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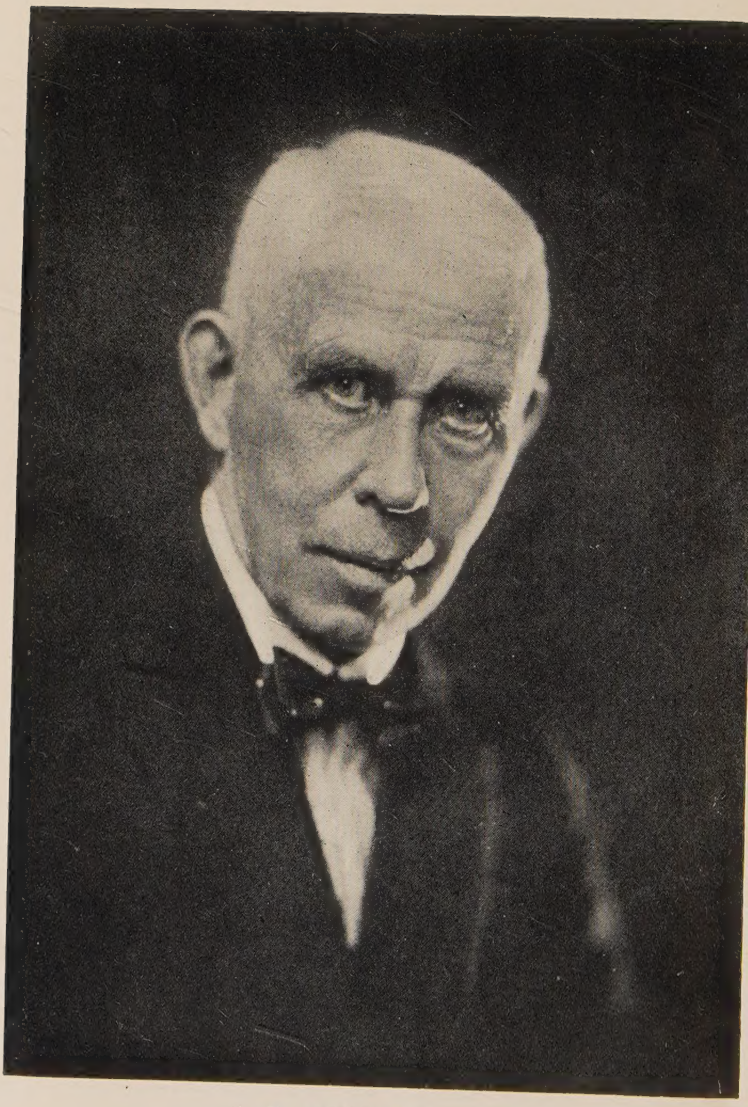

C. E. MONTAGUE, 1927
From a photograph by F. W. Schmidt, Manchester

C. E. MONTAGUE

A MEMOIR

By

OLIVER ELTON

1929

Garden City, New York

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TO

C. P. SCOTT

PREFACE

THIS memoir, it is hoped, will make Montague better known as a man, and even as a writer. Much of it has been in the nature of inlay-work, and the evidence is given as far as possible in his own words, or in those of the best observers. No full-dress criticism is attempted of his style or his writings; but these, surely, will not soon go under in the flood of print. I think that his record can hardly be read without some feeling of exhilaration. The greater the loss, the less can privation be the final word on a man who found that life was such a good thing, such an unending spectacle and adventure, and who made such a good thing of it.

The passages from his war diaries, unlike reminiscences written long after the event, have the force of impressions set down from day to day by a skilled watcher from a special point of vantage.

The few verses included were jotted down in note-books or on scraps of paper at various dates during the war. Some are unfinished in form and none were prepared for press, but they reveal a side of Montague that should not be overlooked.

It will be seen from the text and footnotes to how many persons the biographer is in debt: to lenders of letters; to Montague's colleagues on the Press; and to

his associates in the Army, including, not least, the war correspondents and some of the visitors. These and other friends have kindly furnished either impressions and descriptions (sometimes at length), or facts and details.

Particular thanks are due, in the first place, to Mrs. Montague, who has given unstinted help as well as supplying so much of the material; to Mr. C. P. Scott, especially for approving, and permitting me to use, the matter connected with the *Manchester Guardian*; to Professor F. C. Montague, for his pages on the family history, for much other information of value, and for aid with proofs; to Mr. Francis Dodd, A.R.A., for the use of his drawing of Montague; and to Mr. Muirhead Bone, for the use of his drawing of the Château de Rollencourt. Captain C. R. Cadge has made it possible to state with exactness Montague's position and reputation as a censor; while Lieut.-Col. A. N. Lee, D.S.O., has spared no pains, above all in making clear Montague's labours as a 'conducting officer' and the earlier part of his life in the 'Intelligence'. Mr. Bernard Shaw writes: 'I do not like to let C. E. M.'s ghost pass without a gesture of old friendship'; and it will be seen that it is not a small gesture. Also Mr. H. W. Nevinson, in his new book, *Last Changes, Last Chances*, has once more testified nobly to his friend.

To the following, not all of whom are named in the memoir, I have also to express my obligations: the Master of Balliol; Prof. R. S. Conway; Mr. H. W.

Doughty, for help with the illustrations; Mr. Edward T. Scott, of the *Manchester Guardian*, for information concerning Montague's Irish journey; Lt.-Col. J. C. Faunthorpe, C.B.E.; Mr. W. J. Goodrich; Prof. L. T. Hobhouse; Mr. R. Houghton; Col. Sir Vernon Kell, K.B.E., for authorising the reference (p. 190) to an article written by Montague for 'Intelligence'; Mr. J. U. Powell; Mr. Tinsley Pratt; Col. E. L. Strutt, D.S.O., editor of the *Alpine Journal*; and Mr. J. F. Wylie. The following passages are reprinted by the courtesy of the respective publishers: those on pp. 83, 84, from Montague's Introduction to Mr. James Agate's *Contemporary Theatre* (Messrs. Chapman and Hall); those on pp. 124, 199, from *The Western Front* and *Artists at the Western Front* (*Country Life*); the article, pp. 48-51, from the *Manchester Effort for Press Charities*; and the parody, pp. 21-22, from the *Oxford Magazine*.

O. E.

OXFORD, *May* 1929.

CONTENTS

Chap. I.	EARLIER YEARS	*p.* 1
II.	JOURNALISM, 1890–1900	27
III.	JOURNALISM, 1900–1914	52
IV.	IN THE RANKS	101
V.	INTELLIGENCE OFFICER	132
VI.	PRESS CENSORSHIP	173
VII.	LATER YEARS	235
Appendix.	'INEXPERT APPROACHES TO RELIGION'	291
Addendum.		320
Index.		321

ILLUSTRATIONS

C. E. Montague, 1927 *Frontispiece*
From a photograph by F. W. Schmidt, Manchester

C. E. Montague, 1888 *facing p.* 14

C. E. Montague, 1898 42
From a photograph by Warwick Brookes, Manchester

C. E. Montague, 1905 56
From a drawing by Francis Dodd

'Hut 17,' 1915 112

The Château de Rollencourt, 1916 152
From a drawing by Muirhead Bone

C. E. Montague, 1917 164

C. E. Montague, with Captain C. R. Cadge, 1918 174

C. E. MONTAGUE

A MEMOIR

CHAPTER I

EARLIER YEARS

I

CHARLES EDWARD MONTAGUE, born in Ealing on New Year's Day, 1867, was the third of the four sons of Mr. Francis Montague. The second, Mr. Frederick Florence Montague (1864–1925), and the youngest, Dr. Aubrey Montague, will figure in Charles's correspondence; and so, too, will the eldest, Professor Francis Charles Montague, who furnishes the following account of the family history:

Our father, born in 1815, was an Irishman, a native of County Tyrone. His family had given several of its members to the Catholic priesthood, and he too became a priest. Superior to most of his brethren in talents and accomplishments, he might have risen to an exalted position in the hierarchy. But after some years of parochial duty he began to entertain grave doubts as to the truth of the doctrines which he taught. At length he felt that he could no longer honestly retain his office. He renounced the clerical character and married. Our mother, Rosa McCabe, was the daughter of a successful merchant in the town of Drogheda. Her father, though scarcely an educated man, had not neglected the education of his children. She was a woman of remarkable intellect and force of character, who, almost without encouragement of any sort, achieved an unusual degree of culture. She

read French, German, and Italian books, and was particularly fond of history. Common intellectual interests drew her and our father together. Although she never went quite so far as he did in the rejection of old beliefs, she understood his difficulties and pitied his isolation. As their public wedding would have scandalised all their friends and relations, they went over to England and were married in a registry office. Our father was then in his forty-third year and our mother in her thirty-second. Her family could thus at least appear not to have known of the marriage, although they doubtless suspected it, and, with the exception of one sister, were chilled in their affection. Our father seems to have broken altogether with his family, of which no member was ever known to me.

Under these circumstances life in Ireland would have been too painful for our father and mother. After their marriage they lived in England until the autumn of 1863, when they went for a tour of several months on the Continent. When they returned, they settled in the neighbourhood of London, taking up their abode successively at Richmond, at Ealing, and at Twickenham. They had four sons: myself born in 1858, Frederick born in 1864, Charles born in 1867, and Aubrey born in 1872. Our father, though poor, did not embrace any new profession. For this there were several reasons. When he settled in England he was already middle-aged. A man in some respects of unusual ability, he was neither practical nor enterprising, but sensitive and reserved to a degree which hampered him in the ordinary intercourse of society. The training of the Catholic priest is so peculiar and so stringent that it tends to unfit a man for any other walk of life. As our father was always an ardent Nationalist, he fully partook of the Irish antipathy to the English and felt no desire for intimate contact with the people amongst whom he was

exiled. Leaving household management to our mother, he spent much time in reading theological works and meditating on theological questions. Although he had broken for ever with the Church, he anxiously reverted again and again to the consideration of those difficulties which he had found insuperable. He also devoted himself to the education of his children, for we were never sent to a preparatory school. Not until I was thirteen years of age was I sent to University College School. My brothers went a little earlier, Frederick to my school, Charles and Aubrey to the City of London School. Our father was a conscientious and capable teacher, whose pupils would have compared favourably in point of knowledge with any other boys of the same age.

Our mother's little fortune was the chief support of the family. She was an admirable housekeeper who did wonders with a small income. I still possess account-books filled in her fine, neat hand and attesting her rigorous control of expenditure. Running into debt was a thing undreamt of, for both husband and wife had the strictest notion of pecuniary honour. There was always a minute balance at the end of the year. Our father and mother saw no company, they allowed themselves no luxuries, they never went to a theatre, and, save that our mother sometimes went back to Ireland to stay with her best-loved sister, they never took a holiday. Every other consideration was sacrificed to giving their children the best chance in life. Our mother helped in our education, teaching us French very effectively. She and our father often read aloud to us out of Shakespeare or some other English classic. They always maintained their own intellectual life, and, by means of the circulating library, acquainted themselves with the best books of the day. What they read they discussed in our presence, allowing us to interpose such remarks as we could. Indeed, books were sometimes ordered from the library for our benefit,

but they were always books of substance. Our father especially approved of poetry, history, and natural science, but he regarded novels as, with few exceptions, a frivolous waste of time. The result in my case was remarkable. I had read Plutarch's *Lives* many years before I read *Ivanhoe* or the *Talisman*.

Thus we grew up under conditions unlike those of the ordinary home. Our parents, though not rich, were in a real sense people of leisure, yet people almost out of society. We lived with them far more than most children live with their parents. They always encouraged us to frankness and confidence. Thus our father and mother exerted very much more than the usual parental influence over their children. They were people of strong, almost fierce emotions, passionately fond of their children, living for their children, but little prone to outward marks of tenderness. Of a somewhat melancholy temperament, they were further depressed by what was in a sense exile, by narrow circumstances and by the monotony of their existence.

Their acquaintance with living men and women was slight and their knowledge of modern England, apart from what could be gained from books and newspapers, almost nothing. Although highly cultivated and living close to London, they remained in a sense provincial, and, although Radicals, they remained in a sense old-fashioned. While full of ideas of which the ordinary season-ticket-holder has never heard, they were ignorant of many little facts which he knows and which are useful for the young to know. It was inevitable that children living in such intimacy with parents of so strong an individuality should take their impress. I, who was the eldest by six years, and the most precocious, was in some ways the most deeply affected. Frederick and Charles, very near to each other in age, more adventurous and less secluded from other boys

(for by that time we had somewhat relaxed in our isolation), were more like the normal boy, but yet bore the family stamp. Aubrey, the youngest, came most in contact with our neighbours and their boys, and was the most social, the most popular, and the nearest to the ordinary British conception of what a boy ought to be. What I have written may serve to show that we all grew up under conditions somewhat peculiar, and that our family life was singularly remote from the received notions of Irish habits and character.

II

This picture, so fortunately saved, of a family of sixty years ago, leads me for a moment to anticipate the story. Charles Montague's native reserve could only be deepened by such surroundings. For many years the story of Mr. Montague's severance from the priesthood seems to have been known to no one in England outside the family. But it was in no sense a thing to be ashamed of; and Charles, always a vehement assertor of 'the freedom of the natural soul', admired his father's action. The theme of a priest who has changed his convictions is introduced in *The Morning's War* with obvious sympathy, and yet in a way that could disclose no private history. Charles was also deeply devoted to his mother, who lived till 1906, surviving Mr. Montague by thirteen years.

He was partly isolated by his race. Irish on both sides, he inherited his fervent nationalism; he was a Home Ruler ready made; and he judged the doings of the English in Ireland much as might be expected. Many of his best friends were to be English or Scottish;

he himself was to be a British soldier and patriot; he loved the face of England and her common people; and yet he was at heart something of a foreigner. He remained alien to our great caste-system and to our public schools with their traditions and *tabus*. Indeed, he never well understood them and retained a certain prejudice against them. He had no upper-class feeling; he was a gentleman, democratic by instinct and not merely on principle, caring for the man in the street and the Tommy in the trenches, and predisposed against any kind of mandarin, political, military, or educational.

He never lost the imprint of the strict morality which had reigned in his home, so severe and yet so affectionate. It pervades his writings and his whole outlook. Stoical rather than puritanical, it was humanised by his life in a big city and above all by his life in the War. It was morality of the ardent and sympathetic, not of the refrigerant and repellent kind. So far from being chilled or overstiffened by his upbringing, I think that he reacted against it very vigorously and very successfully. Existence was never grey to Montague. No one enjoyed life more; it was an adventure that could not be exhausted. Anything for experience, so it were clean experience. If his childhood had not been quite normal, all the more he cared for normal persons and for the common round, the open world. Nor had he ever been really cut off from this; he was a companionable man. He grew up in Twickenham, where his family migrated in 1869, and came to know the life of the waterside. Its ferrymen and oarsmen, great humorists and intriguers, figure in his latest

stories;[1] the river scenery appears in his *Rough Justice*; and from the first he loved sport and had a quick eye and ear for nature. Many years afterwards, he wrote:

We lived on the Thames, just under Richmond Hill; and the Park and Wimbledon Common and all the commons south of it down to the Epsom Downs were great places for expeditions in school holidays, especially when there were races at Epsom.[2]

And also, to his brother Frederick, who had shown him an old diary:

I can recall absolutely the capture of the roach on the foreshore, and the passionate vicissitudes in our spirits when it froze on Thames.

His literary sense must have been awakened early. Like other boys, he knew *Robinson Crusoe*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and versions of *Don Quixote* and the *Arabian Nights*.[3] His father read Shakespeare aloud in the evenings; and Shakespeare is a great liberator, who can let much light and air into the mind even of a young boy. Lines and phrases from Shakespeare and other poets are inlaid, often almost invisibly, in Montague's books and letters, like the text of Scripture in the talk of some devout persons. He was, moreover, a born amorist in the matter of words,[4] of their sounds and assonances and 'values'; and his school training, as will

[1] See 'A Pretty Little Property' and 'The Great Sculling Race', in the volume entitled *Action* (1928).

[2] To Mr W. Hutcheon (May 27, 1921).

[3] This list also appears, with additions, as the library of a boy of twelve, in *The Morning's War*, p. 177.

[4] A volume of his literary essays is being prepared for publication.

appear, helped to make him a writer. He was to be haunted by language in the mountains, in the dug-out, and not least in the newspaper office. He came to hate a bad sentence like a bad smell and to revel in a good one as he might in a rose. Hence the nice workmanship, which is perhaps at its best when he takes little thought over it.

It may be asked what, after so uncommon a childhood, Montague was to think on religious matters. His letters and diaries will give some answer; and he wrote, chiefly during the Great War, some pages which, though unfinished, are of much interest and will be found in an appendix.[1]

III

In 1879 Charles went straight from home to the City of London School, travelling to and fro daily. It was at that time, and until January 1883, situated in a street off Cheapside, and was then moved to its present place on the Victoria Embankment near Blackfriars. Charles entered the Sixth Form in 1881, and stayed till 1885. He was happy, successful, and popular; it was a day-school, not one of the resident big 'public schools' against which he was often to speak. How well he is remembered by his early friends, several accounts will show. The first is from Mr. F. E. A. Trayes, who writes:

I have a very vivid recollection of 'Paddy', as we always knew him at school. I can recall the sight of him sitting at the end of the front row in the Sixth Form

[1] See below, pp. 293 ff., *Inexpert Approaches to Religion*.

Room and answering Abbott's questions in a way which aroused the admiring envy of a newcomer to the Sixth like myself. I can see him in the fives court making those wonderful left-hand sweeps from the back of the court.

Mr. John Thompson, afterwards headmaster of the High School in Dublin, thus fills out the picture of the Sixth Form room in the old school, and of Montague's presence: there was a gangway down the floor, and at the bottom of it

stood in lonely grandeur with an unannotated text the boy who was put on to construe, a heart-searching ordeal for newcomers in the form like Montague and myself. If, as sometimes happened, Abbott was a few minutes late, the empty floor was not seldom a wrestling arena in which Paddy Montague and Harry Bradford were usually the conspicuous figures. When Abbott, apparently oblivious, entered, everybody was back in his place, and all was keen attention and concentrated interest.

In the new premises the Sixth Form room looked out on the Guildhall School of Music; and meantime Montague had come to the fore:

Out of school he played half-back for the first Fifteen, but he took no part in the Debating Society. He made steady progress in classics and English. He had a happy gift for the choice and exact word and phrase, and he excelled in composition, above all in Latin verse. Repeatedly in his last year Abbott gave him the coveted '10 plus', and his versions were entered in the *Liber Aureus*. I remember quite clearly Abbott's open delight when he won an exhibition at Balliol. We were all delighted, for never was there

a more unassuming and deserving candidate, whom everybody liked and of whom no one was jealous—the bright soul of honour and the happy soul of merriment. . . . He had a curious physical characteristic, a patch of white hair on the left side of his head. In build he was slight, lithe, and athletic. Never self-assertive or domineering, he had a marked individuality of a high order; he abounded in pure animal spirit; full of fun and quiet humour, he was modest, and never said or thought evil of anyone.

A third friend, Mr. Charles Heath, who left the school in 1884, writes:

It was a joy to know 'Paddy'; and he was an exciting friend, who at any moment might spring on you some joyful surprise; some pithy quaint summing up of a person or situation; never unkind, but searching like a knife. A rather dull hour in a science lecture would suddenly be transformed by the receipt of a scrap of paper containing, fresh from the mint, one of Paddy's living parodies of Bacon or Thucydides, or any author we might be reading.

He enjoyed life—sometimes too heartily for his school work not to suffer. He steadily refused to be crammed—till one fatal July our great H.M. solemnly warned him that he need not hope to go up to Oxford for a scholarship unless he read the whole of Grote and —was it Mommsen?—before he returned to school in September. He worked like a nigger that summer holiday.

He was an invaluable half-back in our rather volunteer school Fifteen, when games were quite unorganised. But we could not count on him for any particular match in advance; he would always say yes or no at once—and never changed, under any argument; and after a time we respected his decision; we rather thought it was

a question of money and fares, but it well might have been some other loyalty we knew nothing of.

On any ordinary occasion you never felt sure that you had him; but in a real emergency you could count on him for certain. He always knew his own mind; the only trouble was, you did not always know it. He was an accomplished athlete and swimmer, but had a modest estimate of his own powers. I foolishly boasted, when he was coming to stay with me at Cambridge, that though I could not dive myself, I had a friend coming up who would think nothing of diving off the top stage at the Bathing Shed. The day came and Paddy said 'he didn't do that sort of thing'. In his odd, stimulating way, he at last consented, 'if I would do it too'. He was bitten that time—and the day after he reached home he wrote me in a letter that he had dived off Richmond[1] Bridge under cover of night.

Montague was deep in debt to that great headmaster Edwin Abbott Abbott, who trained many English scholars. After Abbott's death in 1926 he wrote to his successor, the Rev. Prebendary Chilton:

Alas, I cannot take credit for that excellent notice in the *Manchester Guardian* of that prince of men, E. A. Abbott. To have been taught by him is the most fortunate thing in my life.

An earlier letter also shows Montague's debt to Abbott:

[1] Dr. Aubrey Montague thus describes this incident:

'He wanted to dive from the St. Margaret's railway bridge, about 20 feet. As the railway people objected to trepass, he used to do it at night, when it was impossible to see what might be floating down in the water.'

It is also told that Montague, rowing down from Oxford on one occasion, stripped, climbed the railway bridge below Nuneham, and wondered whether he would dive; but, as a train was approaching, did dive successfully.

To J. H. Fowler

June 19, 1908

Thank you much for sending me your paper on Eng. Lit. in Secondary Schools, which pleased me hugely, partly because it read, to me, like a true sketch of the theory of the best teaching I ever got—that which E. A. Abbott used to give me at the City of London School, in English literature. He could simply transfuse a sense of the fineness of great poetry from his own mind to a boy's, and at the same time the mental-discipline side of the thing was as exacting as anything I was ever given through Latin and Greek, or, later, through logic, etc. You will know his *English Lessons for English People*, a school-book of genius—it must have raised literature from the dead for thousands of schoolboys by this time.

I like much, if I may say so, the way you dwell on the two sides of a proper study of English literature. The few junior people I have known who have read it at Oxford—mostly women—seemed almost incapable of conceiving that it ought to give you both the intellectual ἄσκησις [training] and also the power of aesthetic valuation, and they were always calling one another mere dilettantists and (accent?) ἄμουσοι [insensitive to the arts], according to the particular unbalanced way that each looked at it herself.

Montague took a prize for an essay on some Shakespearian theme; his Oxford skits show him steeped in the idiom of Bacon, whose *Essays* Abbott had edited admirably. There was no School of English at Oxford in 1889, or Montague might have read for it; but probably the 'grand old fortifying curriculum' served him as well, nay, better, for his mental career. He carried away from school a classical scholarship, the 'Master-

man'; and in October 1885 entered Balliol as a classical exhibitioner of the college.

IV

More is known about the four years spent at Oxford. Mr. A. B. Poynton, now Public Orator, says that

he was a great link between the various groups of the College. He was a kind friend, always most exhilarating, and I should think he was the most generally known man of my year.

Some lifelong traits of Montague can be seen in the clear sketch furnished by another companion, Canon R. B. Tollinton:

I have a clear recollection rather, perhaps, of Montague himself, than of the things he said or did. Essentially he was then as afterwards a keen spirit, bent on getting out of life what it had to give, and sharing fully in the College—alike in its intellectual, social, and athletic interests. He just missed being elected a Scholar in 1886. He was President of the Brakenbury Society. He rowed in the Eight. He had many friends. He possessed in an unusual degree the gift of fun, enjoying a jest, contributing from his own wit, and, I believe, not averse, within due limits, from the practical joke. But he took things seriously even then. Indeed it was rather a feature in his character that he combined so naturally gaiety with purpose. He was a Liberal in his political sympathies, if indeed he was not then even further to the Left; and one finds no discrepancy between his work on the *Manchester Guardian* and what he was as an undergraduate. I recall him quoting a remark of the Master's [Jowett], 'You must write for the newspapers', and so he did. I heard him mention with considerable

seriousness the views of people who say there should be no private property in land, though without implying his personal assent. He disliked all that was 'stuffy' or merely conventional, but he had too great a sense of humour to be fanatical or bitter. I still have the photograph he gave me when he went down, and perhaps it is not fanciful to discern in the features a certain youthfulness—in some way he was young for his years—combined with vigour and determination. Another relic I have is a pewter pot, which records our victory in a punt race together at the Balliol Regatta. I can remember his keenness in pulling off even such a minor triumph.

The present Rector of Exeter, Dr. R. R. Marett, also speaks to Montague's qualities as a comrade:

He was the best-tempered fellow in the world and always full of fun. Cheerful, sympathetic, humane, with a pretty wit and a tireless body, he was the friend and companion that it was the dream of one's youth to find at Oxford.

As to sport, Montague also rowed in the college Eight and Four, and was in its Rugby Fifteen. For one exploit he is still remembered by some who were a little junior to himself. In a letter he describes how he had saved a drowning man at Oxford: an exploit for which he was awarded the bronze medal of the Royal Humane Society.

To his Mother

[*Feb.* 1889]

My dearest Mother,

I've had a great adventure this week, and luckily come rather well out of it, though it's a very sad business, and has ended rather tragically for a poor fellow

C. E. MONTAGUE, 1888

belonging to St. John's. Yesterday, after the races, in which I had been running beside our boat, a punt belonging to St. John's was going across the river with a great overload of men, and when she got to the middle she turned over and left about twenty men in the stream, just where it was very full of deep holes, and going very fast with the floods after the snow. Most of them could swim, and got ashore somehow or other, but one man got knocked on the head by the punt and just came to the top twice and shrieked out and then went down for his third time like a stone. I was standing on the towpath among the crowd cheering my crew and just spotted him as he was going out of sight, so I swam to the place as near as I could guess it, but couldn't find him at first as the water was very thick and yellow. I felt a most awful fright that I had missed him, but at the second shot I grabbed him somewhere down in the mud and hauled him up. It's a most blessed good thing that he was quite unconscious and nearly dead, as he was very big, and if he had been conscious he might have drowned me like a shot. I was awfully funked of his doing it, and held him out at arm's length quite resolved to duck him if he struggled, or else to hit him over the nose and eyes with the other hand. Of course the crowd were standing stupidly looking on, but two other men at length came in and helped to fetch him into the shallow water. I can't say how relieved I was to be in my depth again and feel it was all over. We had immense trouble to bring him round again, and I'm afraid he's very badly ill now, as he was delirious all night and thinks he's in the water now. The sad part of it is that another man went right out of sight at once and was drowned. Had I only known of it I could have dredged him up too, but no one missed him and he lay at the bottom till four hours after; it's frightful to think I could have fished him up in time, only that I thought

he wasn't there. You'll be amused at this thrilling exaggeration in the Oxford evening paper. I'm also sending you a review of F.'s [F. C. M.'s] book from the *Oxford Mag*. Everything else is going on all right. Good-bye, dearest Mother. Ever your loving son,

CHARLIE.

His rooms in Balliol were on the second floor just south of St. Giles's gate, and looked out west, on the spot near the Martyrs' Memorial that has so long been given over on Sunday evenings to the open-air preacher. Here, too, on those evenings he could hear the 'roaring choruses' that arose from the 'smoking parliament' of John Farmer, the organist of the college; 'but', he writes, 'as my window is just over the Salvation Army, I thought it needless to join the other'. Farmer had brought the impulse to communal music from Harrow to Balliol and, with Jowett's countenance, he faced all Sabbatarian comment. Montague had no special turn for music though he liked to listen to it; but he had an ear, as his writings show, for niceties of sound and noise: for the 'tin-voiced timepiece' that 'never spoke without first clearing its throat', and for 'the whipped horse's scraping clutch at the ground', and for the successful mountaineer 'gurgling with joy like a fish-fed cat', as well as for the note of the avalanche, 'dreamy and bodiless at first, and then rounding and hardening into fullness,' with the crack that followed, 'muffled at first as if some muting membrane enwound it'.

His good school discipline in the classics served him well. He was twice *proxime accessit* for the college scholarship. In 1887 he won a first class in Moderations with a first-class mark in all but two papers. Then

he read 'Greats', and in 1889 took a second class. The Greeks and Romans figure less than Shakespeare and other English poets in his writings; but they are quoted now and then, Virgil in particular. He was not to show much turn for philosophy, except in one field, that of artistic theory; but he was strongly influenced by one philosopher among his teachers. This was Richard Lewis Nettleship of Balliol, who left his mark on many minds in ways that are hardly tangible. Like many learned Oxonians of his time Nettleship left no monumental book; and he was known for his wary and balanced fashion of stating very definite opinions. But he taught young men to think carefully and slowly; he was an idealist of lofty character, disinterested and full of courage. In 1892 he died of exposure on Mont Blanc. Montague never forgot him, and in the essay 'Across the Pennines' describes his ending as a good and covetable one:

> That such things should sometimes—very seldom—befall, in this greatest of sports, as well as in hunting and football and swimming and every great sport you can name, is nothing against it or them. The mere retention of life is never a big enough aim to absorb all its powers. And even here it may count for a little that death by a fall on a mountain, or by exposure on one, is as a rule, death disarmed, for the dying, of many distresses—those that you know when you see men die, as the grimly ironical phrase is, 'quietly in their beds'.

The figures of other lecturers and tutors flit through Montague's letters to his mother: Scott of Merton, 'a big black-bearded man with a clanking voice'; W. H. Forbes of Balliol, duteously entertaining undergraduates,

although 'his retiring nature intensified so much that three or four times during breakfast he retired into the passage, nominally to correct a mutinous coffee-pot, and was altogether only about ten minutes in the room'; and the friendly Evelyn Abbott, also of Balliol, another Grecian, who taught valiantly for a whole generation, though paralysed in his lower limbs: a familiar sight, as he passed in his wheeled chair through the Oxford streets. Montague especially admired James Leigh Strachan-Davidson, afterwards Master, to whom he read essays; and his own, we hear from a contemporary, Dr. W. G. Stone, 'surpassed all the rest in their light touch and pleasant entertainment'.

To his Mother

Oct. 24, 1886

It is delightful to be tutored by Strachan. The tutoree lies on the sofa while Strachan makes him cigarettes and brews him tea; but men who have offended him he is able to suppress with a weight and dexterity that I have never seen equalled.

Of Jowett also there are various glimpses; Montague, while a freshman, wrote of him naively that 'it is awfully hard to tell whether he is a big humbug or not'; but quotes his sermons with approval, and also his many acts of generosity, whether shown towards the college or towards meritorious young men in need. The sentence 'You must write for the newspapers', with its uncertain sound, must have been pronounced at a later date; it was probably not a career often recommended to the Master's favourites. The two letters that follow give the experience of many another youth of the period.

To his Mother

Nov. 21, 1886

My second essay with the Master was a great failure. It was about Pre-Raphaelitism, and I somehow got off the point into a side-issue which interested me; and also he said that my views on the matter were purely conventional, etc. He finally scored off me by saying, 'You can write a good essay, but you have gone quite off the track in this one. The great thing in criticising art is good sense. Good-bye'; and by dismissing us in this way he didn't leave me a chance to argue with him. . . . Lately, I have had to coach freshmen at the river a good deal; and though it is no exercise, still one is at a decided advantage over the toiling unfortunates whom one abuses with all the worst language and bitterest sarcasm one can think of. The freshers must have found me perceptibly more ferocious after my essay-reading to the Jowler.

To his Mother

June 4, 1887

I like [Lyttelton] Gell much better every time I see him, and he's a capital man for social purposes because you can talk utter rubbish to him and he'll enjoy it like anything, and talk the same back to you. Don't you think this ever so much better than the disposition of the Master, who lies in wait all the time and jumps out and floors one directly he gets his chance? If men don't talk to him he badgers them into saying something, and then he ups in a moment and shows one it's all bosh and one had better hold one's tongue than talk such stuff.

Perhaps Jowett had 'addressed him his most destructive sniffs', as he did to the young man Dawling (so unlike Montague), in the story of Henry James called

Glasses: the young man, 'full of refinements and angles, of dreary and distinguished knowledge'. One more letter gives what is still, I hope, for some, the essence of an Oxford Sabbath:

To his Mother

Nov. 7, 1886. 1 P.M.

I have just finished breakfasting with Allan, a chum of mine, as the clock reached the above-mentioned hour. When one has spent a week in the most rigid economy of time, racing from sleep to work, and from work to meals, and from meals to exercise, and back again to more work, meals, and sleeping, all in the most self-centred and prudent and unsociable way, it is an exquisite joy to spend a whole Sunday morning in a quite useless and lazy and delightful sociability, talking to men one likes, in a room where the sun shines, and rooks caw outside, and the bells of endless chapels, which one need not attend, ring peals. Last year I was never satisfied with my work or tutors, but now Abbott and I are as 'thick as two thieves', and on Thursday he said he didn't see how I could very well miss my 'first' now; and on such sunny Sundays as to-day I sometimes hope he may be right.

Oxford left other than academic traces. For one thing, the lines of her streets and buildings sank into Montague. They reappear, long afterwards, in the pages of *Rough Justice*: 'the Broad, an elongated oval pond of public quiet', and St. Giles, 'a forested street, a cathedral-like street', with a 'broad, roofless nave'. Here is a picture of the Turl, with its 'bottle-necked end':

Auberon almost gasped at the sight of that most Oxford-like of Oxford streets. Fair beyond all desire or dream was the little walled space lifted intact out of

some other age that must surely have possessed its spirit more quietly than we do ours. A spirit of grave, courteous tranquillity shed itself into the air between the street's containing masses of weathered masonry; from gardens out of sight a few embrowned boughs hung swaying over high walls. Along this gracious corridor curiously carved out of stone the hollow echoing of their leisurely feet seemed to mingle with resonances lingering on in niche and coign and gateway from times of which Auberon knew nothing and yet imagined great wonders.

Naturally these visions found no such expression at the time. Montague, like many other collegians, used his quill to make tracings, or mimicries, of the old English masters; it was good enough practice. He was full of book-memories and of rhythms of the past. Some of his undergraduate skits and parodies, produced in the *Oxford Magazine* and signed 'C.', are neat and excellent of their kind. One of them, 'How Thucydides went to the Trials', caught the notice of Mr. C. P. Scott, his future chief. It will hardly bear rescuing here; but the sentences of the historian, when his wheels drive most heavily, are pleasantly copied; one of them is nineteen lines long. Bacon, Addison, Thackeray, Ruskin, and other classics are also among the victims. The best and wickedest echo is that of Jeremy Taylor, 'one of the writers', Montague said afterwards, 'who most of all piqued me to try to write when I was a boy, though I had only read bits of the *Holy Dying*'. There was a copy of that work on his shelves at home. One passage may please those who can relish a *pastiche*:

For so have I seen a man that was spriteful in the vigorousness and strong flexure of the joints of one-and-

twenty, newly gone out from his Rooms, and upon him was the beauteousness of a Blazer of many colours, a Tennis Blazer elucent like the Image of a rainbow, whose very colours and imagery are fantastical, and at first he was fair as the Morning or the shining softness of a Dove's neck; but when a ruder brood had made six bumps, they forced open the modest and newly-sported retirements of his rooms, and dismantled his Table and too well filled Oil Can, and when day had begun to put on darkness, they declined softly to the Quad, and broke its legs, and anointed it, and at night, having lost some of its Leaves and all its Beauty, it fell into the portion of fagots and yesterday's *Times*.[1]

'Into the portion of weeds and outworn faces', says the original. Amidst all these diversions, of penning, reading, rowing, and footballing, Montague began to think what he should do; and, as usual, was sure of what he did not wish to do. In 1886 he declared:

My tastes turn more and more daily from scholarship and ancient literature to modern literature and history; this is probably not for the best, but I am sure it is inevitable.

In the next year his aims have become clearer. Of a friend he says:

To his Mother

Nov. 13, 1887

He has now taken the final plunge and has gone in for living by writing altogether. As I think about these things more and more I come to the conclusion that it is what I must come to in the end and that it is the only sort of work I could really like so well as to do my utmost at it.

[1] Four of these pieces were reprinted in *Echoes from the Oxford Magazine*, January 1890.

But his life was not to be that of the professed student. He meant, then, to write; and for many years he was to write about almost everything. He was to be a notable journalist; few could guess that he was to be a notable author. His critical talent was seen in good time; inventive talent made its appearance very late. Meantime he enjoyed his Oxford to the uttermost, finding it 'hard to tell whether the working or the playing or the resting is more delightful'. He had done well enough academically; but he can hardly have been one of the stars of whose future radiance tutors prophesy, or of those who are assessed as 'coming men' by the odd shrewd instinct of the undergraduate public.

Montague, at twenty-one, seems to have travelled so little that he had never seen the sea. In 1888 he visited a friend at Durham; and Mr. R. I. Simey, the friend's brother, writes, that according to ritual

we, having taken him to somewhere on the Durham coast, blindfolded him and led him to a spot in face of the ocean, so that the whole glory of the scene should burst upon him at once. I forget whether he was properly impressed.

In the autumn of 1889, having now done with 'Schools', he was teaching two young boys, the sons of Lord Arthur Russell, during their holiday and afterwards. One of them, Mr. Conrad Russell, who was then eleven years old, records of Montague that

This was his only adventure in pedagogy. He was a kind and gentle teacher. I wrote English essays for him, and he made me read Bacon's *Essays*. He was the first person who tried to make me realise that there was such a thing as writing good English. He joined in our childish

amusements, which at that time were paper-chases and 'giant's strides'. In the evenings we often read aloud, and there was no attempt to combine instruction with amusement. *Bootles' Baby* by John Strange Winter was one of the books which I can remember him reading to us.

Mr. Russell adds that the Mr. Hathersage of *The Morning's War* is a 'recognisable portrait' of his father, Lord Arthur; and that in the same tale, chapter thirteen, the dining-room of their house is 'very accurately described'. Also that Montague's pupils were the originals of the two small boys who are there portrayed as 'grave, rational, quenched, too sceptical even to disbelieve with a will'.

In September Montague was lodging in the village of Shere, near Guildford, and one night made an excursion with his party to Ewhurst Hill. At one in the morning they watched the world from the top of a deserted windmill; and, in a letter of September 11 he speaks of the prospect over the 'huge Weald'; which was 'full of extraordinary mists and colours with the moonlight':

> The wind was quite tepid while we were squatting on the dome of the mill. You know, it's quite hot among the pinewoods, and when you walk out of them it's like cold water.

The incident is retold in his first traceable essay of a serious kind. An article on 'The Halfway Mill' was printed in the *Illustrated London News* (March 15, 1890). Here we read how a large owl, 'with his firm ringing notes', was 'lying on the air with not the slightest trace of sound or effort, as is the placid *remigium alarum* of owls'; how, to the north-east, was a

'sullen glow which rose over London, a dull pregnant glare that made one think of darkness almost more than of light'; and how the watcher was 'fairly ravished with pleasure'.

During this autumn he waited for work, but had not to wait long. He escaped the common plight of the brilliant graduate who is left to eat his heart out, whether briefless in chambers, or living from hand to mouth on the fees of private pupils. Not that the Oxford shepherds cease, at this stage, to care for their flock. In one of his last stories ('Didn't Take Care of Himself') Montague remarks that

there's a kind of informal Mop Fair, or hiring-fair, every summer at Oxford. Employers of labour drop in and look round, with the aid of wise Dons, for any young man, at the end of his time, who has gumption or guts or is fit to be left alone with a job.

No doubt this still holds good; in old days, at any rate, there was much benevolent industry spent on 'placing' young men. They were taken on to some kind of social or official springboard and given the chance (one chance) to swim or flounder. It does not appear who, if anyone, was Montague's 'wise Don'. One of the wisest and kindest, to whom many men of that period owed their start in life, was Robert William Raper of Trinity. Good heads of colleges, too, did their best for their students. The first opening that came to Montague would have landed him, at least for a time, in Asia. I do not know whether he would have served a life sentence (up to fifty-five) as a bureaucrat; he was offered a job by the educational authorities in Madras as tutor

to certain 'wards', presumably young Indians of quality. But luck intervened. He was already doing occasional reviews for the *Manchester Guardian*. He had made up his mind that he would prefer, if possible, to stay in England as a journalist; above all, if he could work on the *Guardian*. Sooner than other men, Montague was aware of his calling. He saw Mr. C. P. Scott, the editor, told him how he stood, and how he must decide quickly; and received more books to notice, and some leaders to write, during a fortnight of experiment. On Feb. 21, 1890, he had to tell the editor that he must telegraph a definite reply to Madras. He was still free, and wished to decline; and wrote to Mr. Scott, 'I think journalism is the one profession I care for, and would prefer any journalistic work whatsoever to any other employment'. The answer was an invitation to come to Manchester for a month of further trial. It was accepted, and the Indian post declined. On May 19 he could write that the experiment 'ended happily some three weeks ago, and now I am here for good'; and could tell his mother, some months later, 'the firm have let me know they don't mean to part with me; as long as I stay in Manchester my future is pretty well assured'. So it proved; he was to stay on the *Guardian*, with an interval of war service, for thirty-five years. He was now twenty-three.

CHAPTER II

JOURNALISM, 1890–1900

I

I FIRST knew Montague in 1890, when we both arrived in Manchester, and saw much of him during the next ten years, until I left for Liverpool. I was following what he truly called one of the 'dangerous trades', that of teaching literature in a college; but also wrote many literary reviews, and some theatrical notices, for the *Manchester Guardian*. The writing staff of the paper and a number of teachers in Owens College were very well acquainted. There were groups that bicycled, walked, talked, dined, smoked, laughed, and disputed together. One little private talking club, that met many times a year for more than a decade, and then 'faded away', it has been said, 'without funeral rites', included Montague. It was oddly called 'Us', and had Latin rules like Ben Jonson's fraternity. The members were hosts in turn; anything could be, and most things were, freely discussed—always in a cheerful temper. Montague, a pressman with night work, came as often as he could. Once he opened a conversation upon 'Prigs'; I forget what he said, but his look and voice on those evenings remain in mind. His appearance, when you knew his age, was at first startling, with its contrast of colours. His hair, always ample, was grey in youth and afterwards white, like the moustache which was burnt off in the war. His complexion was fresh, and his eyes were keen, blue, and Irish. His

expression was changeful, and no artist has caught it; both frank and wary; in a crowd, a stranger would note it as attractive and humane; yet Montague could wear the peculiar black gravity which seems to be the secret of the Irish. He had a quick upright carriage and was of middle height, wiry and muscular. The granitic mould of the features came out more after the war, in later life. His voice was somewhat low in pitch, though not a bass; on occasion it would vibrate. His utterance was at first hesitant, almost apologetic, as though he wished to put himself in tune with you and make no mistakes. There is a Russian word (*chutky*) for a person who is aware of atmosphere, and of what is going on in those about him; and Montague was that. He disliked and eluded verbal arguing; he preferred, in talk, an easy exchange of ideas and a free play of mind. His mien in company, and also in doing business, was shy, but usually cheerful. His native modesty was at once evident. He may have suffered from his courteous self-control, and might have done better, as he must have wished, to break out oftener. These traits, so far as I know, never altered. Owing to distance, we met much more rarely after 1900; but he was always the same friend, always ready to encourage, always responsive, always readier to think of others than to talk of himself. In those early days, be it repeated, his promise as an artist could hardly be foreseen. We knew his quality as a journalist, and that he could do something better than the best journalism; but what, was uncertain. It might seem that his true line was to criticise the drama.

Meantime, at twenty-three, he sat down to learn his trade. For eight years he was to be a bachelor. At first

he lived in rooms in the High Street, about a mile from the office, and just off the main road which leads into Cheshire and along which in the suburbs abode most of the journalists and dons. For years the routine of his life was almost without incident; it was that of all pressmen who work at night. A visit to the office between tea and dinner, to arrange and begin the work; then, after a light meal, labour till the small hours; a walk home through the dark streets; up again about, or before, noon; and, after eating, a walk or bicycle ride before starting again. Such was the round; but on one thing more Montague insisted. At any cost he must save, for work *not* connected with the paper, a few hours in the good time of the day. His very presswork, he knew, would be the better for it; and it was this rescued time that set his mind free and quickened in the long run his inventive powers. Also he had at disposal the last half of Saturday and the first half of Sunday, and his annual holiday of a month.

II

A letter written twenty years after to an old colleague brings back Montague's novitiate on the Press.

To E. G. Hawke

May 18, 1920, *Guardian* Office

I must be almost the only survivor here of your time —except Wilfrid Spencer and Biggs.[1] Sometimes there comes across me the grotesque notion that some very young new arrival regards me with actual awe—me

[1] The former sub-editor, the latter reporter, on *M.G.*

that was the baby of the staff when Arnold, Spenser Wilkinson and I walked home up Upper Brook St. together every night . . . I holding my tongue and sucking in all the information I could remember, to make up for the pleasantly wasted years of my youth.

Montague learned much from these seniors. Mr. Wilkinson, the publicist and dramatic critic, afterwards professor of military history at Oxford, had served long on the *Guardian*, but left it in 1892. He has a warm recollection of Montague as a newcomer. Many years afterwards, in June 1917, Professor Wilkinson was 'conducted' by him, as a guest of the Army, to Albert, and also to Vimy Ridge; 'part of which', says Montague's diary, 'was being shelled' at the time. The other companion, William Thomas Arnold (1852–1904), was a scholar-journalist of a rare order. Except Nettleship, no man influenced Montague more strongly. He had a severe fastidious conception of his calling and applied to presswork the methods of the *savant*. He had hundreds of pigeon-holes full of cuttings, or *fiches*, on as many subjects, always kept up to date. To these he could turn, and write with a weight of knowledge in reserve. He was chiefly concerned with public affairs, but his interests went far beyond politics. The nephew of Matthew and the son of Professor Thomas Arnold, he was well versed in classical, English, French, and German literature. His special field was the history of the early Roman empire, and he left behind him an unfinished but important book, *Studies of Roman Imperialism*. It was posthumously published in 1906, and edited by Mr. Edward Fiddes, with a memoir made partly by Mrs. Humphry Ward, Arnold's half-sister, and partly

by Montague. This memoir was separately republished in 1907. Montague's pages give his confession of faith as a journalist. He expounds with eloquence those strict ideals, not only of conduct but of technique, which are associated with the *Manchester Guardian*. This was the tradition to which Arnold contributed so powerfully and which Montague himself was to carry on. Also he records a friendship, and gives an exact etching of Arnold, with 'black hair, a redoubtable chin, and a great beetling, lined forehead'; telling, further, how Arnold instructed younger colleagues with 'a controlled, judicial impatience, a kind of wrathful affection for ignorance'.

Those of their companions who remain can remember how well the two men fitted together both in business and in their play. They walked and bicycled, each with a keen eye for the lie of a country, in its watersheds and contours, and for direction. They were, says one[1] who often walked with them in the Peak, 'ideal companions, both scholars and men of the world, full of the joy of their work and of jolly laughter'. They shared a passion for the theatre. They worked together for some six years, until Arnold's health gave out; then Montague stepped naturally into his place as chief leader-writer and second in command. I must say little of Mr. Scott's part in training, appreciating, and encouraging Montague, but it must be remembered throughout. He is still at his post, the honoured veteran of the English press. What he thought of his colleague will appear later, from his speech on the occasion of Montague's retirement in 1925.

[1] 'P.J.H.' [Sir Philip Hartog], in *Times of India*, June 6, 1928.

III

The new recruit learned rapidly and was soon a good and ready writer. In the end his unsigned articles were such as to make his signature superfluous and the editorial 'we' transparent. But at first his contribution was merged; for some years it had not much colour; and the rule of the paper, afterwards somewhat relaxed for articles other than political, was anonymity. Montague as a journalist was many-sided; but his work was of a special stamp. He was interested not only in public affairs but in plays and pictures and books and climbing and topography and twenty other things. No dilettante, he informed himself thoroughly, and wrote very carefully, on every matter that he touched, studying the methods of his editor and of Arnold. He was never, indeed, to compete in political experience with the one or in weight of knowledge with the other. Until the Great War he did not meet a great many prominent persons; and he never haunted Fleet Street, or mixed very freely in what is called general society. He was, indeed, naturally sociable, and by no means a hermit. He dined out, when time allowed; and he saw passing visitors—Sir Wilfrid Lawson, Richmond Ritchie, Sidney Lee—and noted their talk. Manchester is hospitable, and guests stream through it. The house of the two Miss Gaskells, great hostesses and notable ladies of an older day, was open, and their kindness to newcomers was unstinted. For all this, Montague's way of life was laborious and somewhat restricted; and his resources as a publicist were lessened in consequence. But he gained as a writer. His style was formed partly by his daily work and also

by the leisure and solitude that he wrested from his work; and after a while it became sharply individual.

At the same time, he made himself a brilliant and 'bonny fighter'. During his first ten years of presswork he took his share in every fray, and was heart and soul with the policy of his paper. He wrote for the Armenian against the Turk; for Home Rule against Ulster; for the cautious, as against the 'forward', policy on the Indian frontier; against military annexation, like that of the Philippines; against Bismarck, and Chamberlain, and Rhodes. In 1895, when Montague was twenty-eight, one of his articles on President Cleveland's Venezuelan manifesto was shown to Mr. Gladstone, who sent the message: 'Tell him from me, a man of eighty-six, that I hope he may live another sixty years of happiness and usefulness'. The article is a sensible appeal, patriotic in tone, to the public to keep its head, not to retaliate in equally offensive terms, to wait for the result of the Commission, and to work in concert with moderate opinion in America. This was one of Montague's many styles. He used it in his frequent 'leaders' on the Budget. But he preferred to hit out; and he could produce an article of raking satire which was justly admired by those of his own camp and by sporting opponents, but which could turn old Tories purple with emotion. His nationality comes out in his remark that there was no moral obligation on the Southern Irish 'to feel affection for a country that has annexed their country to itself by force'.

Until the Great War Montague's work was chiefly in the office; his excursions on business seldom ranged beyond Lancashire. Once, in July 1891, when he was

still almost a freshman on the *Manchester Guardian*, he was commissioned to visit Ireland; and, along with some other journalists, he watched and reported on a contested election at Carlow. At this moment Parnell, after being deposed by the majority of his party, was conducting in Ireland the campaign which has been called 'as hopeless as that of Napoleon after Leipzig'. Montague sent seven long telegrams to the *Guardian*, on successive weekdays. It is clear that he foresaw the defeat of the Parnellite nominee; that he thought poorly of the candidates on either side; and that, while he probably shared the view of most Liberal Home Rulers that Parnell must go, it was Parnell whom he found interesting.[1] The leader's fall from popularity is traced; he is, we hear,

freely insulted now by scores of peasants who seemed six months ago to feel that gratitude required them to be no worse than sullen. . . . His personality loses more of its influence every week. It was highest in the years when he never came to Ireland, and these Irish campaigns are cheapening it slowly but pretty effectually. On the railways nobody marks him, and very few will leave the hay to hear him speak.

Justice is done to Parnell's speaking, which on this occasion showed 'scrupulous care and searching after verbal clearness and exactness'; and it is thus summed up:

Mr. Parnell's astuteness is infinite. With a few sentences of confusing rhetoric he persuades a group of sensible men that he has still a right to present himself

[1] See below, p. 97, letter of May 22, 1914.

as an undismissed party leader. And then he talks such excellent sense to them about land reform as makes them forget that his own position is indefensible and that his present campaign is damaging the prospect of every reform for which he asks support.

The principles of the *Manchester Guardian* are well known; enough to say that Montague was one of its chief spokesmen. One tenet, which could be debated without end, was, in his own words, 'to bring all political action to the same tests as personal conduct'. This canon governed all that he wrote on public matters. It certainly inspired all that he was to say on the Boer War, and on the Great War; although, in the latter case, it will be seen that he was aware of a cruel moral dilemma. When to his mind a case was clear, as in the South African conflict, he felt unhampered; and he was never more lively than when he had his back to the wall. After his death the *Manchester Guardian* said that he was 'politically, a gallant adventurer on the right side, ready at all times for the difficult, the opprobrious task'; and those who think he was on the wrong side will agree as to the gallantry.

Turning over the folios of his old 'leaders', I find it strange that the man of letters should have survived this nightly warfare, carried on for a whole generation. Journalism is hardly an art; it is indeed a craft, but a craft that turns out perishable goods; and it is best regarded as *action*, that is action remembered, if at all, only in its results. Montague was a good craftsman, who could not write an incompetent or muddled sentence; but this gift is not so uncommon. He could, I think, be ultra-refined in his dialectic and in verbal fence.

He sometimes lets the public see that he thinks its head is very thick. He uses, after the manner of his calling, the method of iteration, varying his phrase with surprising ingenuity; and, when he is annoyed, explaining his point almost in monosyllables, and with that 'affronting lucidity' which someone imputed to J. S. Mill. His edge becomes much sharper towards the crisis of 1900. But the real point of interest is the effect of this monstrous amount of penwork upon Montague's original writing. Probably it was threefold. First, it was long before he found time to write a book, or to consider how he should write it. Next, his daily practice gave him ease; and to be careful became second nature. The ready flow and accurate form of his letters and diaries will, I think, strike the reader; and he could show the same spontaneity in his books whenever he was so minded. But thirdly, Montague lived a kind of double life as a writer. As though in revolt from the plain elegant manner, his first love, the manner of Swift and Goldsmith, he came to vary it with a much more intricate one, which is not indeed obscure to the attentive mind, but which is closely packed, and much embroidered, and elaborately rhythmical. This manner, too, can be very good, and is just as much his own as the other; but it is not so safe. Sometimes, and above all in parts of the dialogue, it seems to me to miss fire. But it is always of curious interest to the fellow-worker in words. You are watching, never a mere mechanic, but a lapidary, or rather an artificer in steel who is damascening the blade and inlaying the hilt. The two styles, of course, often alternate, or shade off into each other.

IV

But this is to forestall the narrative of how Montague mastered his job. After some years he became highly expert in the task of revising other men's 'copy'. There are many tributes to his skill. Mr. Filson Young says that 'the best education I have ever had at any part of my life was obtained by his editing of what I wrote', and that 'he never altered a word without my learning something from it'. The following notes give a clear picture of him at the age of thirty; and they come from an excellent witness, Mr. J. B. Atkins, afterwards to be editor of the *Spectator*. At the time to which they refer, Arnold had begun to feel the malady which forced him to resign his post at the end of 1898. Meanwhile he struggled on gallantly; but Montague was doing much of his work, and was soon to be his successor.

In the summer of 1896 C. P. Scott invited me to Manchester for a few weeks to fill a temporary gap in the general work of the paper, though not as a political leader-writer. This led to a connexion with the *Manchester Guardian* which lasted for some years and was very happy for me. Montague found rooms for me in the house where he lodged in High St., Chorlton-on-Medlock. I had not read more than two or three of Montague's articles in the paper before I conceived a deep admiration for him as a writer. I have known no political writer who could use his material with such consummate skill. I read him with unfailing delight, even when I disagreed with the premiss or the conclusion, or with both.

I was then bursting with a desire to learn how to write, and it seemed a godsend to be living in the house

with the man from whom, above all others, I should wish to learn. I am afraid I plagued Montague with ingenuous questions, but I soon found out that though he was willing to talk at any length on writing in general, he would not talk about any particular thing written by himself or any particular thing written by me. He was, as you know, shy, or what people call 'reserved'; and his reserve for some reason, in his relations with his juniors, made him refrain from criticism. Often I wrote something for the paper—very bad I have no doubt—of which I did not know that Montague as editor disapproved, until I saw the next morning that it had not appeared. Yet nearly every night for a year or more we used to walk home from the office to our lodgings along about two miles of street.

I can only suggest that it was a kind of super-delicacy in Montague which made him thus refrain. This delicacy, however, in a man like him must have had a reason behind it; it was not mere caprice. I suggest that his profound respect for personal freedom and for the rights of the person somehow or other suggested to him that direct criticism—and much more that sort of chaffing or brutal criticism to which I had been accustomed at Cambridge—was a kind of impertinence or intrusion.

When I fully recognised his native shrinking from the task of correcting a pupil I did not try to persuade him to change his ways. One of his wise general rules for the instruction of the beginner was to send him to Shakespeare plays. Although he thought any Shakespearian play, even though badly presented, worthy of the pen of the best critic, he made a point of letting his juniors try their prentice hands on Shakespeare. He thought there was no better training than to hear Shakespeare and to try to arrange one's thoughts about him. The most I could induce Montague to do when

I invited his criticism of a particular piece of writing was to advise me to see W. T. Arnold.

Arnold then lived in Nelson Street, and he was always ready to take any manuscript and turn it inside out and explain sentence by sentence why he did so. Montague, apart from his great affection for Arnold, respected him as a master of his craft. He used to say that any criticism of his own would be valueless compared with Arnold's. This did not meet with my view at all; as, though Arnold certainly had a wider knowledge of history and politics than Montague had at that time, he was a positive, direct, almost rugged writer with little of the enchanting allusiveness and pointed irony of Montague. It was *Montague's* qualities I was after, though I must add that Montague's model of writing was a snare to many. Perhaps if I had succeeded more than I did in imitating him I should have done worse. Imitation Montague was a disaster. Truly he was inimitable. Yet those who tried to imitate him could not but find in him an unfailing inspiration. I do not think that anyone who worked with Montague, if he had any shred of literary honour or decency, could sit down and consciously produce a sloppy piece of work merely because he did not wish to take the trouble to do better.

I have referred to Montague's almost exaggerated respect for a man's right to his own opinions or his own way of doing things. Among his other qualities was a sense of honour which I think was the most scrupulous I have ever known. His detestation of anything that even approached the mean, the shabby, or the egoistically inconsiderate expressed itself not only in some perfectly chosen caustic phrase but in the expression of his face. You could see that he was utterly repelled and filled with scorn.

In regard to the authorship of anything in the *Man-*

chester Guardian Montague applied his code of honour most strictly. Anonymity, he said, was the rule, and therefore the rule must be observed. There must be a 'collective credit or discredit' for everything that was published. When he was questioned by some outsider as to who had written a certain article, he looked rather as I imagine the Duke of Wellington must have looked when he was asked by a lady whether he had been surprised at Waterloo. 'No, but I am now', is said to have been his answer. Montague was certainly surprised.

v

Soon acclimatised, Montague had thoroughly adopted the dark rainy cosmopolis as his own city—'this dear city', as in 1925 he was still to call it—with its press and its college, its theatres and its music, and its company of friends. He well knew, besides, that there is beauty to be found in Manchester by those who will look; and a gloomy kind of grandeur in some of its streets, through which, as Dr. Johnson said of Charing Cross, there runs 'the full tide of human existence'. There is the western sun on the wet cobbles trodden by clogged and shawled millgirls going home. The pastels of Francis Dodd bring out the quality of old houses and leafy corners. Montague did relieve his soul, in *A Hind Let Loose*, on the town scenery of the Irwell. But in his essay 'Joys of the Street' he observes the frequent 'dignity and large unity', the 'composure and impressive reserve' of the big warehouses; and he finds poetry in the faces of the banks. He was in the end to go back to the South, his first home; but he honestly loved the North, and hated to leave it when the time came.

In the summer holiday he made off, frequently to Switzerland, and more than once to Italy. In 1897 he saw Florence, and rushed over Rome. He had done his first peak, as a novice, in July 1891, going from Chamonix with guides up the Aiguille du Moine: a climb, he says, which is 'not much thought of'; but the ascent seemed rather hard and the descent harder. He had already found time to make some characteristic notes of colour:

I watch the sunshine stepping down the mountain that it climbed last night; and a mist forms from the Arve as it grows warmer, and goes up the hill to meet the sunlight. Then the two hazes—of light and of water—make all that was clear ten minutes ago as pensive as a Corot; and I go up through the joint mystery of them to Montanvert by the meadow path.

Montague mountaineered whenever he could, in the Lakes and Derbyshire as well as in the Alps. He did not discover new heights or aim at making 'records', but took the severe game scientifically and faced all the usual risks. More than anything except war, climbing satisfied his thirst for adventure. He qualified for the Alpine Club,[1] was elected a member in 1906, and in 1926–7 served on its committee. The spirit and poetry of the heights pass into his books; and, like Leslie Stephen, he stands high among the climbers who are writers also. After his marriage his constant companion was his wife; they often went without guides, and their favourite starting-point was from Chamonix or from the valleys south of the Rhone.

[1] There is a short obituary notice of Montague by the present writer in the *Alpine Journal* for Nov. 1928 (vol. xl. No. 237).

In April 1898 he wrote to his eldest brother of 'the immense happiness that has come to me'. This was his engagement; and on December 20 he was married in the small Unitarian Platt Chapel, Rusholme, Manchester, to Madeline, the only daughter of Mr. C. P. Scott. They settled in Oak Drive, Fallowfield, close to Mrs. Montague's parents, and remained there until they left Manchester in 1925. It must be enough to say of this marriage that it proved altogether happy and fortunate. Montague's letters to his wife, hereafter quoted, will show something of the fullness of sympathy and companionship which this reticent man—solitary-minded, although so friendly—had at last found.

VI

The next years were those of the South African War, which, like Home Rule, clove in two not only political parties but many friendships. The *Manchester Guardian*, it is well known, was on the unpopular side. Mr. Scott was unwavering; and the *Guardian* weathered a gale of obloquy. Montague, I think, was rather inspirited, as though the gale were blowing down some nasty yet quite manageable 'chimney' in a rock. He made a large scrapbook full of press cuttings, chiefly hysterical revilings or solemn excommunications of the 'Pro-Boers'.

To his Wife

Oct. 13, 1899

I read some *Gulliver*, the part about politics in Laputa—it's such congenial reading if one feels a little bitter about politics. After a time one feels it's no good

C. E. MONTAGUE, 1898
From a photograph by Warwick Brookes, Manchester

trying to be as bitter as Swift, so one unconsciously gives up trying and becomes good-humoured again. [He had been writing 'Transvaal articles' and had received] one furious jeer telegraphed from Crewe station by some patriot, who had caught the 10 o'clock to London Road this morning and I suppose read my 'long' with so little pleasure that he risked losing the train at Crewe in order to send us a curse by wire.

But abuse was nothing; the dreadful gravity of the business, and the painful sense of being for conscience' sake not at one with the mass of the nation, weighed on him as on the rest. In the Great War there was not to be this kind of distraction in his sympathies. Nothing special need be said about his writing on South African affairs; there are masses of it, buried in the files; his policy was that of the paper which he helped to guide. His articles show much forensic skill, and also a passionate conviction; they are not declamations, but close, able, and often bitter arguments.

VII

All this while he had been much engrossed with the fortunes of the acted drama. Already in 1890 he had begun to frequent the theatre, and to study, at the prompting of Arnold, the writings of Francisque Sarcey and Jules Lemaître. In October he reviewed a reading that Professor Lewis Campbell had given at Owens College of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. He praised the speaker's elocution; pleaded (in vain, so far as I know) for an English stage adaptation of the play; and pictured the huge Greek theatre, 'crammed to the doors', with 'on the one side the great multitude bursting with the

secret, and on the other the single man who is blindly groping for it before their eyes'. It is a very good notice for a man of twenty-three, and gives a clear hint of a critical gift which rapidly expanded. During the next ten years Montague wrote on many plays and many players. The *Guardian* has always done its best for the Manchester stage, and has taken it seriously. It has printed many reviews of merit; but there is no harm in saying that its dramatic criticism is linked with the name of Montague. Here, too, he learned some of his craft from Arnold; and he has handed down to younger writers a tradition of good work. He took the line of avoiding personal acquaintance with the actors and actresses. He told me once that there was no middle course between doing this and mixing freely among them. He liked them, but felt that his hands would be tied by knowing too much about them. I believe he feared that he would be too soft-hearted in print if he realised their rubs and difficulties and their natural sensitiveness to the next morning's paper. More than other kinds of artist the actor lives and breathes by publicity; his reception is immediate or nothing. Montague, in fact, was not ferocious at all to ordinary players; he passed over the bad ones, and did all he could to encourage talent. On Sarah Bernhardt he would expatiate; and over Mr. Benson's performance of Richard the Second he let himself go, because it seemed to him to catch a subtlety intended by Shakespeare. This notice, written in 1899, was often quoted afterwards; it is in Montague's best style, and shows him already occupied not only with the play but with aesthetic theory, before the days when Croce was

familiar. In 1894 he had duly lashed Sardou's *La Tosca*, with its cheap appeal not to 'pity and terror', but to the nerve of horror.

Some of these early notices reappeared in 1900 in a little volume now long dead and never very lucky. *The Manchester Stage*, 1890–1900, was a series of reviews reprinted from the *Manchester Guardian*; the writers were Arnold, Montague, Allan Monkhouse, and myself; and the preface, a rather solemn descant on the duties of the press towards the theatre, was mine. The book was put together chiefly in order to save some of Arnold's fugitive work; it was sound work, and it was forgotten; he was ill, and it might (and it did) cheer him up to see it again. Still, things dashed off in a heat at night time, just after the theatre, will seldom bear more than one printing. The small book fell dead; the *Spectator* patted it, so to speak, upon the binding, and Dr. Adolphus Ward, in the *Manchester Guardian*, gave it a lengthy, dignified blessing; but the London press was mostly chilly, and the publisher altogether sorrowful. I only now know that Montague, moved by his appeals, acquired thirty copies, which long stood up woodenly to attention on his shelves. In 1908, we hear, 'they still moulder in my dressing-room'; and, again, 'cohabiting with them for seven years has done my vanity a lot of good'. Not until 1911 would he bring himself to sheave up some more 'first-night notices' into a book. But he was going to the theatre all the time; and the volume called *Dramatic Values*, to which I shall return, was the result. One enterprise should be mentioned in which Montague took a special interest, and which he supported and encouraged. It was the most persistent and

successful effort yet made in Manchester to sustain the serious drama. It was due to the generosity and zeal of Miss Horniman, whose company opened at the Midland Hall in September 1907, and was transferred to the Manchester Gaiety Theatre in April 1908. Many plays of note appeared, and much good acting was seen, during her tenure, which only came to an end at the close of 1920.[1]

Politics and plays, during these ten years, did not exhaust Montague's interests. He wrote eagerly on many other things. He made memorial eulogies of Gladstone, not simply as a statesman, but as a great idealist who had survived into a time when there was 'a low fashion of thinking'. He pleaded for the grant of university degrees to women, as an item in their claim to equal rights in all things. He supported the movement for independent universities in Manchester and elsewhere. Other themes were less controversial. He closely followed the annals, including the calamities, of mountaineering, and reviewed many books on the topic. With much diffidence, and unnecessary secret shame, he 'noticed' many picture shows. He kept an eye, too, on cricket and other sports. Once he was in court during a murder case; and he wrote home:

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[1] For an interesting review of the fortunes of the Manchester stage, see a lecture by Mr. Allan Monkhouse to the local branch of the English Association, reported in *M.G.*, Dec. 10, 1928. The Gaiety venture succeeded the Shakespearian productions of Mr. Calvert and the first performances of Ibsen. It lasted long and did well, but failed 'to create a suitable audience', and suffered from the war; and after Miss Horniman's retirement it lacked capital. The Rusholme Theatre, the Amateur Society, and the University Dramatic Society are later and active enterprises. It would be a service to reprint this lecture.

The mother was giving evidence against the one of her two sons who had cut the other's throat. I don't think the prisoner was half a bad fellow 'at bottom'. He was drunk when it happened, and he was sober when I saw him, and I never saw a man look wretcheder; his face was all yellow, and perfectly seamed and scarred in all directions with sunken lines and twitchings.

Most of this work was only for the day; but, altogether, Montague in 1900 must already have been, in his own style, one of the most efficient all-round journalists in the land, and one of the least tired. In 1896 he had written to his mother:

It has been a wonderful change for me, my work here, from all the years before it, when half the time seemed to be filled with solitary thinking about things —about myself chiefly, I expect—now it seems as if, all the working day, I were just finding that I must rush away from one absorbing piece of work, or interval of playtime, in order to do something else that can't wait. I like it; and my six years of it have gone by like a few months; but I often wish I could share some of this merry bustle of occupations with you, who must have many dull hours during the day.

VIII

Here may be rescued, both for its own sake and to show that Montague was no light o' love in his profession, an essay that he wrote in 1923. It appeared in a little miscellany, which is explained by its title, *Manchester Effort for Press Charities*. The essay is called 'A Potent Medicine'. It ought to cheer the mind of many a journalist, and almost to persuade a professor to take to presswork.

There are kinds of tobacco that often make you swear while you smoke them, and yet you find, if you try, that they have spoilt you for smoking anything else. 'It never done no good to me, yet I can't leave it if I will', you say of one of these, as the soldier in Kipling said of the world.

Journalism is something like that. Just wed her, and you'll see what a shrew of a wife she may make—but you'll never leave the dear termagant. All of us who have wedded her call her, at some time or other, every bad name we can lay our tongues to. She lets a lot of us down. She draws on us sneers without end from the bigwigs of literature, the mandarins and the professors. And yet, just think of turning out, for the last time of all, from the lit, living office, embowelled with all its great purring or roaring machines, into wet Manchester midnight. No, you can't think of it. 'It is too dreadful', as Claudio said about the idea of dying rather more completely. This large part of extinction is not to be faced.

But why not this part in particular? Is it that journalism, in some especial degree, remains always a venture more precarious than many? Perhaps you bet a little more than some craftsmen do on the sight of your eyes and the spring of your mind—on keeping your hold upon some little gift, perhaps, of animation or a vivid touch. And every paper, no doubt, is a ship that may settle down, with all hands, far from land—may even be scuttled, without any breach of criminal law, by some owner who cares for another ship more. And yet I don't know. Other trades have their risks, and one light will blow out as well as another, and anyone's horse may come down as soon as anyone else's.

Is it, then, that a pressman's work is often a bit of an art and also a bit of a science? A bit of a profession, too, and a bit of a business, so that it always can find

some new side of your mind to enliven, when other sides of you have had enough? Perhaps.

Or is it simply that the detail of the life has an endless day-to-day variety? One journalist, I know, has not found any two days of his work alike in thirty years. Every night he has felt, when he entered his newspaper's office, as if he were just untying some curious parcel that looked good, come from Heaven knows where. What letters would there be, lying upstairs on his table? To what country, new to himself, might there be orders to go, to Ireland or Abyssinia, to a theatre or a war? With word of what earth-shaking event would the chief sub-editor come at the witching hour into his little still room, slung up above the sleeping city that they were to set all a-buzz at daylight with the news? You might suppose the thrill of hearing things a few hours sooner than your fellows would soon pass away. Some of us never find it has passed. We always seem, at our work, to be closer up against the life of our time than anywhere else, nearer its centre and more in its confidence. With all that is setting people agog in cities all over the world clicking and humming in on your ears, tapped or buzzed out at the tips of all the fluent imperturbable wires that run in on the place, it needs little effort of fancy to feel as if you were hearing the actual stir of existence, the unconscious breath of life itself; and the beat of its pulse seems to set your own going better. Perhaps it is this.

Or perhaps it is for none of these sound or plausible reasons, any more than it is for sound, assignable reasons that men fall in love. Perhaps we really ought to be dealing in things like grey cloth and not in readable words, as Falstaff should have conversed with the wise and the good, not with the wildest of princes. But that young man could somehow 'give you medicines to make you love him'. So can journalism.

IX

This enthusiasm did not always come to the surface. As in the army afterwards, so in the office, he could severely restrain his emotions. But those who were near him came, if not always at once, to see what lay beneath. This is evident from some notes furnished by Mr. Herbert Sidebotham, now a well-known political journalist, who joined the *Guardian* staff at the end of 1895 and remained until 1918. Though not an intimate friend of Montague, who was his senior, he was a close associate and warm admirer. Mr. Sidebotham speaks, like others, of his unbroken politeness and unbroken reserve, and of the difficulty of knowing him well. 'His manner seemed to me to convey quite a wrong idea of his nature.' He mentions Montague's many generous actions, and how handsomely he wrote of Mr. Sidebotham's own gifts as a journalist, after long observing silence on the point; and how, when the two met in Lille just after the Armistice, Montague was 'his old kind self'. The following sentences add notably to the picture.

His politeness was extreme, and it made his censure so indirect that the point of it could easily be missed. The Lancashire-born man likes bluntness and prefers it even when the point is against himself. Montague belonged to a different race and spoke a different idiom.

Nevertheless, he

got on frightfully well with 'working men'. He was an enthusiastic member of the *Guardian* cricket club, and the compositors[1] used to like him tremendously. They

[1] On the opinion in the composing-room, see p. 267 below.

were not in the least embarrassed by his manner; or perhaps the enthusiasm of the game cleared it away. At one time I did a great deal of work upstairs in the composing-room, looking after 'make-up' and so on, and Montague, I know, was exceedingly popular among them, not merely admired as a writer but liked for his good-fellowship. They penetrated his crust, which was too hard for many of us. In their reading of character they were right, when the intellectuals were wrong.

He liked moral courage and intellectual humility in journalism. He used to quote to me Arnold's dictum that knowledge and specialisation were the salvation of journalism. Montague would have admired a journalist who knew all about black beetles and wrote authoritatively and well on them; for the mere word-spinner, even though it might be on the immensities and eternities, he had a deep contempt. He loathed mere glibness and facility more than anything else in writing. If he saw a man struggling with the expression of his ideas, he was sympathetic, and hailed it as a sign of grace; that man was saved. He loved to see a man honestly hammering out his own style for himself. In thought he was always specific and concrete; he hated windy generalities or arid general principles.

CHAPTER III

JOURNALISM, 1900–1914

I

PROFESSIONAL work was now to stretch out until the Great War with scarcely a break. Montague was not only second in command on his paper, but already had special responsibilities. From 1895 to 1906 Mr. Scott sat in Parliament and was of necessity often in London. In his absence Montague wrote half of the more important 'leaders'; he set and revised the work of the other leader-writers; and he was the referee on any point in doubt that might be submitted by the sub-editors. Thus engrossed, he might well seem less communicative than ever; and the dropper-in, whom he was too polite to dismiss in words, might be struck by his silence and mistake his reserve. But he does not seem to have been jaded by all this business. His *stylus*, or steel pen, became sharper than ever. The policy and programme of the *Manchester Guardian* are matters for the historian of that period, and do not concern us here. It was always in the thick of the field; and Montague was, amongst other things, its brilliant and expert cavalry officer, never happier than when he was called to the hottest corner.

For five years after 1900 the Liberals were in opposition. The Boer War, dragging on in a new form until 1902, was for long still the paramount question. The concentration camps, the treatment of the vanquished, and then the constitutional settlement were fiercely

discussed. Milner, Rhodes, and Chamberlain were standing targets. Montague, with his chief and his colleagues, hit hard; he pegged away night after night with a provocative repetition of his points and with unfailing vivacity. He felt that he was fighting in a holy war. Sometimes he had to write the obituary word on Rhodes or some other noted culprit; and this, without softening his own convictions, he would do in handsome terms; it was like the salute of one of our airmen to a Richthofen. After the Boer War Chamberlain's proposals for tariff reform were assailed by the great Free Trade newspaper, and here, too, Montague took a hand. After 1905 the issues began to change. The position of the Lords, and the Parliament Act; Home Rule and Ulster; women's votes, and the noise of the militant suffragists; on all these matters, during the years before 1914, he wrote without stint or sign of weariness. Also he turned out numberless reviews, theatrical notices, and miscellaneous articles. Once more, it is hard to see how his style can have survived such an existence; but it did; nay, in some sense, seems to have thriven on it. He found time to write his first three books. But to return to his personal history, which will best be given in his letters; and these now begin to multiply.

II

There was not much change in his outer life. The office work went on, the summer holiday came round, the precious hours were saved for original work, as before. In September 1902 he says, in a letter to his wife, 'Sometimes I want so badly to write things that

I could write them and then tear them up and not feel it any loss of time'. Montague was not to print his first novel till he was forty-three. He did compose, about the year 1902, a play which was to lie by and finally to appear in 1927 as a story, *Right off the Map*. His happiness was increased by the coming of his seven children, five sons and two daughters. He was little known by name to the public, though his repute as a critic of the theatre slowly spread and was established in 1911 by his *Dramatic Values*. During the first six years of the century he suffered many losses of friends and kindred. In 1905 he had to note that 'there was no end to the massacre of efficients of forty to fifty or so—Arnold, Arthur Johnstone, York Powell, any number of them'. Arnold died on May 29, 1904; the memoir, already mentioned, came out in 1906. Arthur Johnstone, the musical critic of the *Guardian*, and York Powell had also gone in 1904; the first at thirty-three, the second at fifty-four; each with his share of genius and with much work left in him. Some of Johnstone's musical reviews were afterwards republished; and, like those of Montague on the drama, they well endured the process, and also revealed a vivid and unique spirit. Powell, too, had written much for the *Manchester Guardian*, chiefly upon books; he was not in accord with its politics. His review was often

an essay almost as readable as his talk was absorbing—swiftly written and rushing like speech, and yet set with curious artistries of the good kind, shot with ironies and clanging with whole pomps of proper names, used like the drums in a symphony.

The words are Montague's, who knew Powell little

but had met him, and who describes his talk in a passage[1] that I am glad to rescue; it throws light on both men:

As Powell puffed his cutty pipe and tumbled out the cornucopia of his mind, exulting in things he had seen —a new Rodin, a prize-fight, *Hedda Gabler* at the Vaudeville, anything—with a learning that dignified the gusto and a gusto that redeemed the learning, you guessed that here was what had been wanted, a Paterism ruddy and brown and unchilled by its founder's fastidiousness. The erudite, unsentimental rhapsody over almost anything, as it might seem, that was carried past by the merry turbid stream of experience —the Boat Race, a new achievement in scientific history, Norwich ale, neo-Celtic verse, the various ways of making cider—was neither of Oxford, the Oxford of many dons and a few pundits, with their manifold rejections and disgusts, nor yet of the ordinary rude-healthed man of the world who lives with a relish and some skill. That was the complexion of Powell's mind, as the passer caught it.

1906 began sadly for Montague. In the early spring he lost his mother, and his feeling towards her is shown in a letter.

To E. G. Hawke

April 5, 1906

She was the bravest person I have ever known, and thought no more of death, when she knew it was coming, than of going into another room. There are some things to be glad of—that she was never ill or oppressed during all her eighty years. One tries to count up these things, but you know what it is.

[1] *Manchester Guardian*, Nov. 29, 1906: review of *Life*, etc. of F. Y. Powell, by O. Elton.

In the same year he was forced by ill-health, due in part to overwork, to take a longer holiday than usual. The doctors threatened to forbid him night labour altogether if he did not relax. He went to the Alps, and got well; and he clearly enjoyed himself.

III

Most of the letters now to be quoted are written to his two brothers; to Mr. Francis Dodd, the painter, now A.R.A.; and to Mr. Allan Monkhouse, the novelist and playwright, who was on the literary staff of the paper. Mr. Frederick Montague, it may be said, was a solicitor in London, who took pupils; he kept up with Charles a pleasant and almost lifelong tournament by correspondence on all manner of questions. His own letters are not preserved; but some of the replies, in which the ball is nimbly volleyed back, tell us a good deal about Charles.

To Francis Dodd

April 2, 1905

It's true about biography. There are none, that I know of, after Boswell, whom we've been reading aloud. . . . Some time or other after Boswell the thing went wrong as portraiture did through Reynolds (didn't it?), and now if you wrote a biography with any guts in it you would be accused of defaming the defenceless dead. Just think what a grand little devil Charlotte Brontë must have been really, and see how Mrs. Gaskell felt she had to prettify her up. . . .

I hope you find the Spring a good intoxicant. It goes to my head better every year, and I shall certainly

C. E. MONTAGUE, 1905
From a drawing by Francis Dodd

postpone dying, by every means consistent with honour, and any others I can use. In this weather I get a feeling that to stay indoors and write works about equal to *Macbeth* is a contemptible spiritless sort of business and that I must out and mow grass with my kiddies in the garden if the higher part of my nature is to get its rights. This is the way one tries to keep one's heart up, by talking like this, when all the time one's sense of the gloriousness of the whole show is half-petrified already. Why, I remember its seeming like a romantic adventure to be in a month called April, or June,or December, or anything else. Some day or other there will arise a boy who has learnt to write before he's twenty, and then you'll get books!

To his Wife

June 21, 1905. [At Oxford; Parson's Pleasure]

I had a glorious bathe, with all the varieties of running and other headers. It made me feel about 19 [he was 38], and I was horridly crestfallen when the loquacious man who looks after the towels, etc., said, 'Well, Sir, you *have* been enjoying it—and I *must* say, Sir, that considering your age you run like a young 'un'. It was disgusting, because I had been feeling how jolly it was to be still young. . . . The beautifulness of Oxford today really makes me think Newman was right when he spoke of the loveliness of some music as 'making you feel almost faint'. One just aches at it, you feel as if you must do something or other to it, or to the people who are taking it all so placidly.

To his Wife

Arolla, *July* 12, 1906

It is as intoxicating as ever to be on top of a snow peak, or to hear the little whistle of the wind in a high

place before daylight, or to feel the hard snow scrunch under one's heel on a glacier, and the dawns, high up, are still the most wonderful things in the world.

To his Wife

VISSOIE, *July* 27, 1906

[Talk with a young friend]

. . . I doing my best to run down the philanthropic career and cry up the career of ordinary industry, and he opposing. I find he has the oddest, gloomy conception of the state of mind of the quite common, undistinguished busy person—clerk, artisan, etc; attributes to them all the melancholy view of their own lot that he himself gets of it through the combined mists of his 'divine' (and other) 'discontents'. It made me half inclined to cry, and half to laugh, to be let into his idea of the general misery and degradation of his fellow-creatures—the people who are whistling, singing comic songs, and revelling in their families and Saturday outings and everything they come across, while poor X trails along in his brown studies. I broke out as dithyrambically as I could on the happiness and reasonable moral satisfactoriness of the common, unself-pitying person, and raged against the whole school of fastidious compassion, with their negations and abstentions and refusals and their undervaluing of the common person's vitality and geniality. It was half-tactical, and half really fervid—for it did make me shudder to think of the uncritical, happy people I have seen crowding Blackpool trains and London music-halls—to think of their being taught how to be wise and happy in life by people not yet through the elaborate melancholy of youth, or by poor, shuffling, half-defeated, semi-competents like ——.

To Francis Dodd

Dec. 22, 1906

I put in half an hour at the Holman Hunts the other day and came away aching all over with moral benefit, but perhaps this may be partly laid to the charge of ——'s catalogue. All the same I felt as if H. H. could have painted real lovely pictures if he could only have kept from deepening people's spiritual lives, like the gentlemen in the *M.G.* advertisement page 1, col. 1. It made me feel as the terrific bits of description in Tennyson do, cast away among all the blamed teaching.

To F. C. Montague

June 5, 1907

[Certain historians] have a real hatred of seeing anything put well; they are like Puritans in presence of a presentable bonnet, and seem to feel it actually incompatible with a sense of evidence in anyone writing history. I murmur, but of course, as a layman, don't count. Only, I know that if the brood of historians who write so that one wants to read them, like you and York Powell, is ever extirpated by the people whose pages are all footnotes, we half-educated people will have to read the subject in plays and novels exclusively—like Marlborough, wasn't it? And worse than the unreadableness itself is the pride of unreadableness.—Ugh.

To F. F. Montague

Aug. 27, 1907

I don't remember reading *Rhoda Fleming* at all closely—only a dim impression of an interesting character, one Robert something [Armstrong], and of what struck me as probably a great shot, for a man, at the

sensations of the girl who is badly treated, and also of one sentence: 'the farmer'—or squire, is it?—'walked through June roses to church':[1] which I often repeat to myself still and which seems to me to have the same sort of demonic power on one's imagination as Burns's metrical sentences about running about braes from morning sun till dine. Meredith seems to me to have this knack of taking one's breath away with something that looks plain enough and yet lets off springs and fires, coloured lights, etc., inside one's mind. I think he 'has a devil' in the matter of dialogue too; I often feel like going through the talk of his people with one of my blue pencils of office and knocking things out that seem unplausible, like the one you mention; and yet the dialogues as a whole seem to get at a sort of cumulative effect of veracity, or of uncommon vivacity, as if, though people don't speak so now, it is the way they are ineffectually or unconsciously trying to speak: so that in the book you get them with their animation raised to the *n*th power of itself. Of course the strict naturalistic theory of fiction may bar this, but then it would bar most of Scott, most of Fielding (as it struck me the other day in re-reading *Tom Jones* during our holiday) and lots of other things that I like—which of course is the supreme test of literary merit.

To Francis Dodd

Sept. 27, 1907

I have just got my whole family back, Heaven be thanked, and can settle in for the winter contented—though it is still the most gorgeous early autumn here that I ever saw—sunshine all day, and a leaf will lie

[1] 'When on a Sunday he [farmer Fleming] walked home from church among full June roses.'

where it falls,[1] all the afternoon, and in the evening the whole thing just draws back into that faint still mist. It must be the devil to paint. What a wunner Keats was to get as near as he did in *the* ode—or rather to get the whole thing so super-perfect that in weather like this one feels that really it comes up to the Keats. I never got the feel of autumn myself so strong as once in Lausanne, when I was having my supper at one of those iron tables that scrunch on the pebbles, under plane-trees, outside a restaurant, and noticed a leaf or two twirling about in the little eddies of dust among the trams, and the streets cheering up when they lit the lamps. The Strand at 6 P.M. these days must be something scrummy.

To Francis Dodd

Oct. 1, 1907

Here is a bill that seems to give more of the names of the crew of the Playgoers' Theatre's frail shallop. They seem to be getting on all right in the way of making people come. My wife and I went last night and there was a pretty full house for Rostand's nice fireworks. You get rum playgoers at the Midland—I suppose because it's a hotel and people fling cropfull[2] out of the Louis Seize Restaurant or the evening-dress-compulsory *table d'hôte* and ruminate in the theatre as the warmest place. One son of Belial flown with insolence and dinner sat next me for the first act of the Rostand last night, moaning, 'O it's awful, it's awful', 'Well, this is the softest piece I ever saw', 'If only they'd sing a good song or *something*—I don't care tuppence what—but this here! My God'. We scowled him out after an act.

[1] 'But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest' (*Hyperion*, bk. i.).

[2] 'And cropfull out of doors he flings' ('lubber fiend', Robin Goodfellow, in *L'Allegro*).

To Allan Monkhouse

Oct. 5, 1907

Do keep yourself time, whatever happens, for writing of your own. The paper easily devours all our time, if allowed, but, even in its own interests, it has to be prevented. I believe you give it more of you than any of us. This isn't just altruistic patter—I make an hour or two for my own use (apart from mere exercise-time) a first charge on each day, and I do believe it's better for the paper than if it went to doing more reviews.

The spring and summer of 1908 were clouded for Montague and his family by the death in May of his brother-in-law, Laurence Prestwich Scott, aged thirty, perhaps the nearest to him of his younger friends. Laurence Scott was a journalist of parts and promise, and Montague had watched with affectionate care over his work. The two were more intimate than is usual in such a relationship; and in the dedication to *Fiery Particles*, many years afterwards, Laurence is joined with Arnold and with Siegfried Herford[1] in a noble epitaph.

George Meredith died on May 18, 1909; and Montague's article in the *Manchester Guardian* next morning, written in a glow of admiration, is also an eloquent statement of his own faith. Here are some of the more characteristic sentences:

Mr. Meredith's novels and poems are a spring of optimism, an assurance of the splendid 'worth-having-

[1] See below, p. 126.

ness' of life; if anything can, they will filter the mind clear of turbid despondencies, egoisms, sentimentalisms; they put shame into the sneak that one carries about furtively in one's soul. One could scarcely be wholly and energetically mean at heart while walking in frost and sunlight and north wind on the main ridge of the Alps. A novel like *Beauchamp's Career* or *Sandra Belloni* has that semi-physical power of challenging the reader's spirit, a cleansing excitement under which you recover lost perspectives and come upon the truth of what is best worth having, doing, and being, with a delight that seems to be of the senses, like the delights of high air and the prospect of vast distances. A great enjoyment animates it all. . . .

It is a minor detail of his glory that in his work alone will the future see the English squirearchy of the nineteenth century as it was in life, with its good manners, its capricious selection of chivalries, its special type of caste feeling, its general impatience of ideas, its occasional flowering into characters of a brave beauty, in which its own virtues rise to their utmost refinement and its defects are cauterised away by some noble heat of sane enthusiasm. From whatever class Mr. Meredith's circumstances had picked his sitters, the portraiture would probably have had the same power to give back to the spectator's mind the undeflowered power of fortunately placed youth to look at the daylight world without blinking anything it finds there, and yet to find that, as a whole, which is not given merely as a plaything to any one of its parts, for the lifetime of that part, the world is very good and may be made glorious.

The following unfinished lines are more or less in tune with this review:

(On reading certain modern poets, mostly very young.)

Is this the end of all our ways,
  The beckoning light we struggled to?
The Nunc Dimittis of our days,
  A shrill and querulous review

Of many little discontents,
  Of all the good that is not done,
Of all the poor incompetents
  That muddle on beneath the sun?

What if behind your shoulder now
  Some witty god should watch and laugh
While you with corrugated brow
  Are making man an epitaph:

'His boyish will would tame a world,
  His vision reach the burning heart
Of passion; but he tired; he furled
  His flag and went and moped apart.

'His youth would leap from earth's last verge,
  Sped by his unmisgiving mind,
Beyond uncharted wilds of surge
  Another, ampler earth to find.'

To F. F. Montague

Nov. 20, 1909

Methuens are going to publish early next year a sort of skit, or narrative farce, of mine, conveying some derision of certain doings that sometimes go on in my trade. After trying to describe workmanlike journalism in the little thing I wrote about Arnold it seems symmetrical to describe the *corruptio optimi* too [in *A Hind Let Loose*].

To F. F. Montague

Dec. 14, 1909

I fancy the way the English political fight strikes you is humanity's inevitable view of a country's domestic quarrels when seen, more or less, from outside. I went about Ireland during the first heat of the Parnell feud, with an assorted company of English and Scottish newspaper men, and have always remembered the mixture of amusement and contempt with which they regarded the keenness of both sides and the 'scathing exposure' offered daily by everybody. I suppose all the big struggles everywhere looked pretty much the same in their time, except in superficials, for Thucydides gives a description of the effects of party feeling in Athens, and the way it made people lose the meanings of words, etc., which is beautifully appropriate now. He even described the Jingo press during the Boer war with great minuteness. I see something of keen women suffragists here, and also of Socialists, and am tickled to hear them on the evils of party spirit—they evidently imagining that they are going to have party and none of its maladies with it.

To F. F. Montague

Office, *Midnight, Dec.* 31-*Jan.* 1, 1909–10

I think I agree about the Irish rhymes on the whole, with reservations about some lyrics of Yeats, which seem to have the demonic combination of apparent inconsequence and real significance that the greatest swells in that line have. I do think the genius is more for prose. Even foaming at the mouth, in prose, is done much better by an Irishman than an Englishman—*e.g.*,

J. L. Garvin in the *Observer*—and in the harder parts of the game the superiority is still greater.

IV

His first story, *A Hind Let Loose*, appeared in 1910; and he felt many misgivings.

To Allan Monkhouse

Feb. 3, 1910

I had been rather hoping that Methuen's shop might be burned down with the MS. in it. It's only a sort of overgrown skit, or narrative farce, about various kinds of rotten journalism. Cheerful subject, isn't it? My wife says that if it's noticed at all in the *M.G.* we shall have to leave Manchester, it will be so embarrassing, whether it's slated or not. You see what young authors we are.

To Allan Monkhouse

March 9, 1910

I am just overjoyed that you think there is some good work in my wild Morality Farce. You put it much too kindly, but I did try jolly hard to make the surface texture of the thing engaging, all over, so as to keep people from noticing the amateurishness of the structure, and the way that nearly all the characters are only half imagined and not observed at all, except a mere scrap of a trait here and there. What you, by a too generous interpretation, take for searchingness is really, to a great extent, simple exaggeration and forcing of notes on my part. . . . But there is really no sort of restraint or nicety about the sarcastic line of comment, partly perhaps because I was feeling pretty savage

when I first wrote it, during or just after the Boer war, when the island unsubmerged by meanness seemed deuced small, and partly because it was then written in the form of a farce, with a disposition to over-emphasise and broaden *ad lib.*, in deference to the evil theatrical tradition which you moderns like Galsworthy have since shown to be all rot. As it is now, it is merely transposed into narrative by blowing out the stage-directions till they almost burst, and the three-act farcical formation can be seen protruding through its skin.

To Oliver Elton

May 17, 1910

Glad the ribaldries [in *A Hind Let Loose*] made you laugh, but don't try to conceal from yourself the rotten unobservedness of the whole thing—New Brighton [1] is the only thing or person honestly drawn, or even attempted, in it: the rest is humbug—pretending to be observation when it is really only abstract ideas togged out to look like human. I have a notion of trying the real thing some day.

All this, I imagine, will rather incite those who do not know the book to read it. Montague's cold fits after seeing himself in print, his modesty about his work at any time, and his aspiration after perfect form, often lead him to 'slate' himself beyond measure; and it only remains for the reviewer to tone him down, and to protest that he has done some things very well. *A Hind Let Loose* does not set out to be a serious picture from the life, with a careful 'structure'. It is mostly frank

[1] *I.e.* the description of the casks and oranges bestrewing the sand; worked up from his article in *M.G.*, Jan. 2, 1905, 'Something Like a Wreck' (that of the steamer *Ulloa* on Burbo Bank in the Wirral).

caricature, with plenty of wild wit, by which none of the characters are spared; except, indeed, the little Irish wife, who timidly, in a world of bluff, speaks up for common honesty. Her talk with her Irish husband, Fay, who writes leaders for both parties under different names, is excellent; it is the first occasion on which Montague uses the Synge-like idiom of his country. The picture of New Brighton (Manchester and Merseyside are melted together in the scene) is a companion one, although in another tint, to Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie's tragico-satiric poem entitled *Ham and Eggs*. Read again to-day, *A Hind Let Loose* and its 'ribaldries' are fresh enough. The wit is angry wit; it is a '*morality* farce'; and the tale is inscribed 'To C. P. S., through whom an English paper is clear of these stains'.

The comedy did not end with the story. Three years later there was a mishap, which Montague took somewhat in the style of Charles Lamb when his extravaganza *Mr. H——* was damned in his presence. The *Hind* had been originally, about 1900, written as a farce; and this is quite as lively as the novel. Also, in the nature of the case, it is plainer and more direct. The subtleties are put into the stage-instructions: the tones required, the gestures and the play of features, afterwards elaborated in the story, are inserted for the actors, much as they are in the plays of Mr. Bernard Shaw. They are in fact too subtle, at least for an ordinary company; or so it proved. Mr. Philip Carr, who was the London dramatic critic of the *Manchester Guardian*, produced the *Hind* in a little theatre in town. This belonged to an establishment, called 'Cosmopolis', for giving instruction in modern languages. Two or three

performances were arranged, the first for April 23, 1913, Shakespeare's 'birthday'. It is not clear that more than one came off. At this Montague was not present, but he attended a rehearsal. The cast was unequal; and it is also easy to see that the author had not learnt practically the craft which he could so well appraise. Indeed, I only unearth this affair to show the sporting spirit in which the failure was taken. Mr. Carr writes that

> None of these things, distressing as they doubtless were, to Montague, succeeded in diminishing his cordiality, helpfulness, and good humour.[1]

To F. F. Montague

April 28, 1913

Your forbearing note about the Cosmopolis show was grateful and comforting. I fear it must have been pretty catastrophic, especially on the first night, though some of the papers try to "ide it 'andsome', as Kipling says. The dress rehearsal that I saw was both discipline for the soul and also good fun of its kind, so I've not been damned in vain. At the end of the rehearsal my Fay came off the stage saying to the producer and me, 'Well, God help us!' which further moderated any hopes that the general aphasia of the company had left in me. I thought Mrs. Fay was all right, except that she urged me to write a Grand Guignol play next time, which would hardly set my genius.

[1] I have been able to see a typewritten copy of this play, through the good offices of Mr. R. Crompton Rhodes. For probable date of composition see letter, p. 66 above, of March 9, 1910. Mr. Rhodes writes that he himself had a plan, which was however frustrated, of producing the *Hind* at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, in aid of a war charity.

To Allan Monkhouse

April 25, 1913

My farce has had the greatest failure on record in London, but I have scored a priceless museum of prodigies of tact in the way of letters from eye-witnesses. At the end of the dress rehearsal, which I saw, the chief actor came off the stage saying, 'Well, God help us!' But apparently He didn't.

Reverting to 1910, I give another letter to bring out some of the reflections that lay behind the satiric story of the *Hind*.

To J. H. Fowler

April 19, 1910

Thank you much for your goodness to my little farce. Every copy bought of it is an ὠφελιμὸς στέφανος [profitable crown], or rather ἡμι-στέφανος [half-crown] (I've forgotten my accents) to the author, but he likes yet better that friends reading it should *eadem amare, eadem odisse* as he did when writing it. There is enough to hate in current journalism, in all conscience, and happy endings to stories won't be obtainable until we have got our half-educated nation educated really. I never feel in the least that I want to go back on moves like the 1870 Education Act, but the middle stage of the educational process, during which we have a British nation of lower-school boys and girls, with the mental vices of adults, is not pretty, is it? As soon as ever the country reaches the stage of civilisation that a boy comes to when, in the fifth form, or soon after getting into the sixth, he strikes the delights of intellectual companionship with the right sort of master, then the various little games of the mere perfunctory party madders (*sic*) and

of the 'new journalists', etc. will all be up, but there's a lot of work to be done before we are there.

I read your notice of Duff[1] with much satisfaction, as I read everything that I know you to have written and some that I only suspect. I like your description[2] of Virgil's gait. Don't Roman writers seem to have a special sense, as a body, of the rapidity of sunrise and sunset, and to have felt the need of dodges like that final monosyllable[3] to convey it? Cf. Virgil's

Vertitur interea coelum et ruit Oceano nox,

just the opposite feeling to Kipling's English one of 'the endless summer evenings, on the lineless, level plain'. I remember very long evenings in Italy; but one hears English people talk of the sunset shutting down in that swift way on the Riviera. Of course on the Alps you feel it.

Another note on education may follow here. It is of present interest, for I believe that there are 'schools of journalism', in England as well as overseas. Also it is still an uphill job to persuade the business man to behave like this enlightened velvet-manufacturer.

To J. H. Fowler

Nov. 19, 1910

It looks as if it would be a tough job to keep the humanities going, and humane, during the evil time of hobbledehoyism in education—and of a stupid pseudo-utilitarianism. It is very typical that, by way of

[1] Of Prof. Wight Duff's *Literary History of Rome* (1909).

[2] Shakespearian phrase of his correspondent in the review, ' "the proud full sail" of Virgil's verse'.

[3] Comparison by Duff of sunset passage in the *Ancient Mariner* with Ennius's *simul aureus exoritur sol.*

preparing men for my business, some of the universities are getting up little special courses in the technics of journalism and the elements of special subjects that may come up in it, when the one thing that disables almost all young journalists is that their general education has not been liberal and has stopped in the middle. However, one is sometimes amazed, on the cheerful side, by the streaks of intelligent thinking that one finds in the plain business man. The other day an elderly velvet-manufacturer here told me that when he wanted a new clerk for his business he always went for a boy well up on the classical side at the Grammar School, and shunned all products of infantile specialisation in commerce, book-keeping, shorthand, etc. He had found that, even simply for business purposes, the educated boy had more mental order, curiosity, animation, openness to ideas, etc. than the young dragon at double entry and the like.

V

To F. F. Montague

FALLOWFIELD, *May* 20, 1910

I quite agree with you about the special objectionableness of 'dying peacefully in one's bed' after a more or less extended term of half-death. The sudden death, from the heart, and the more instantaneous of the accidental ones, are the things to hope for, and they should come at whatever point between 70 and 100 one can carry on full activity and health to.

The wish, we know, was not to be granted, although in the war Montague was often to risk the 'instantaneous' ending. Many letters of this and the following year are on literary matters.

To Allan Monkhouse

Aug. 11, 1910

If ever there is any spare time again I should like to make a desperate shot at a yarn of the non-farcical kind; it's so frightfully more difficult than just rigging up scarecrows. But one wants one's average of one free hour a day for reading even more than for writing. I wonder how you manage. I fight hard to keep the little bit of time between my late breakfast and early lunch, but it doesn't always exist.

To F. F. Montague

Nov. 18, 1910

We have read much of Henry James lately, and even one as late and mysterious as *The Awkward Age*. At the first reading it seems like a flagrant specimen of 'legislation by reference', but on a slow second reading the minute vividness of it comes out wonderfully. I think he's a great man without high spirits, if that be not a contradiction in terms. He never seems to get the divine drunkenness of invention on him that Thackeray and Dickens have at their best, and Meredith often. We are re-reading *Pendennis* again now, and it is odd to see how puerile a lot of the common run of it seems after the more searching moderns, and how much Thackeray's little bourgeois limitations weighed on him.

To F. F. Montague

Dec. 23, 1910

O. G. [Goldsmith] is the man I put top of all English prose writers, and have always testified my sincerity by aping him even more than Swift or Bacon. He seems to me, when he writes, to have pretty well all

the excellence of the best French prose and of the best English too, and though I don't suppose that he or anyone else ever wrote well when drunk in the tame ordinary sense, he must have had in most glorious abundance the power of working up the creative drunkenness of the artist. *Quam praeclarus est poculus meus inebrians*, as somebody says of it, or [of] the allied excitement of the religious visionary, in the Bible. I've never read any letters of O. G. He must have had the Irish passion for pulling English legs, in an extraordinary degree, for his record in Boswell's *Johnson* reads like the narrative of one long hoax, told by the bewildered hoaxee.

In a letter to another friend Montague avers,

I have never read many books and can only read them word by word, mentally pronouncing each word, and it makes a book a great undertaking.

Still, in this fashion he read a good deal, and read it in the way that was right for *him*; tasting the words, considering how to write and how not to write, and with his eye always on the artist's procedure. At the same time, he finds that the prose writer no less than the poet must be, like the man in Plato's *Ion*, not quite himself while he is at work. Much is heard of his 'divine drunkenness', 'excitement', and 'urgent heat'; and this exaltation, says Montague truly, is felt in Meredith. In his own early novels there are Meredithian turns and twists; but, more than this, he evidently liked to write at a high pitch, when he was well strung up, and to keep the reader's temperature high too. There are few of the long, cool, level spaces that we get in Fielding or Thackeray. It is another method,

which in a happy hour may win dazzling effects. Montague does win them, and has a surprising power of keeping up the tension. There is also the risk, which he does not always escape, of overstrain; every sentence is a performance, and the bright play of language distracts us from the matter. But these are the faults of an artist, not of a journeyman. So, too, his criticism, right or wrong, is never academic, but that of a man to whom words are alive and electric.

To F. F. Montague

FALLOWFIELD, *Jan.* 5, 1911

I have long quoted Tennyson's 'blind hysterics', with an English application, in my daily small-talk, or small writing, to English readers, and rejoicingly agree with your illustration of its fitness. Do you know Bernard Shaw's comparison of Nelson, as the typical Englishman, with his 'Kiss me, Hardy', 'a peerage or Westminster Abbey', etc., and Wellington, the Irishman, with his account of Waterloo ('I can tell you it was a damned near-run thing') and other matter-of-factnesses and anti-emotionalisms? There is a good deal in it, though Wellington's pedigree may not be perfect for the purpose; and I rather think the Englishman must be becoming more excitable as he becomes more of a city-dweller.

To F. F. Montague

Jan. 27, 1911

Avaunt with your insubstantial distinction, or antithesis, between grasping things and turning phrases. It is, *me judice*, largely by turning phrases that things are grasped; as portrait-painters tell you that, in no

figurative sense, they discover character through brush-work, *i.e.*, the technical effort of adjusting the expression to whatever has been already observed begets in the observer, being also a craftsman, a kind of heat or exaltation of the observing faculties, in which state it is comparatively easy to observe and divine and infer an enormous lot more. Actors tell you the same, and altogether I'm feeling rather sceptical about the seaworthiness of the whole current assumption that matter and manner, substance and method, idea and technique, etc., are readily separable and contrastable.

To Francis Dodd

Feb. 12, 1911

We've finished *The New Machiavelli*, and I've had the converse reaction to yours—I still admire many things but am sick at the formless writing of all the political stodge. I cottoned to it again at that scene with Margaret, where Margaret feels as I suppose Mrs. —— must have done; and he does get a feel of the real thing where he describes finally the way he loved Isabel. But O the waste-paper-baskets full of fluff about 'constructive' this and that. We read a short Henry James after it, and what a calm, tranquil perfection of workmanship it seemed, and what a god's temperament compared with Wells's;—and yet that kind of urgent heat in the writing sometimes does wonders—in the *Tale of Two Cities* for instance, where it makes a great book in spite of a thousand bookish sillinesses.

To F. F. Montague

Feb. 16, 1911

You amaze me by overlooking the structural cunning of Shakspere's lyrics; and, as for *Tam o' Shanter*,

it has, *me judice*, almost as much structure as a boat, or a barrel, or a good vase, or his own *Jolly Beggars*, or a sonnet of Keats, or any of the most finished structures there are. I remember you used to admire the structure of *Tom Jones*, but it seems to me, good as it is, to be almost top-heavy and lop-eared compared with the crafty distribution and balance of parts in *Tam o' Shanter*, and the 'cuteness of the dovetailings between, for instance, the narrative and the reflective passages. I can't remember Autolycus' song, but think I know by heart most of the Swan's lyrics, and often go over them when cycling home at night; and am constantly surprised afresh at the cunning way in which each line is worded so as to keep its suggestion just rightly related to that of every other, sometimes casting back with a half-repetition to make you pick up some image from a previous stanza, and yet leading you on to a new one to pair with it. *Vide*, for instance, 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun'. I agree that the 'criticism of life'[1] and 'excellent [high] seriousness' tests are rot. They are the natural rot of a born amateur; but would you find any painter or poet or artist of any kind in whose mind the laying-out of a piece of work was not all-important? It seems to me the chief difference between the published works of a thrush and a spadger that the former are structural and the latter not, or only most rudimentarily so. You can't get beyond the first words of writing anything before structural difficulty begins to straddle across the path, and I expect it goes on absorbing you more and more, because it is so confoundedly harder than just making the purely local texture shiny with the *mot juste* and all that. However, I must dry up and go home, as I could jaw all night on this sort of workshop lay.

[1] Obvious lash at Matthew Arnold; who, however, also preaches 'structure' with all possible vigour.

To Oliver Elton

March 4, 1911

I crowed on reading your letter [on *Dramatic Values*], especially at your thinking best of the things I most want to do the right way and am most in a funk about —that is, about anyone else thinking them any good, for I jolly well know, myself, that they're the least bad part of my stuff.

Yeats and his lot had a rousing week here—full houses and no points missed. Lady Gregory and he were in high spirits. I'm hoping it has brought in some of the needed money. The place is really looking up, I think, and the Gaiety has built an audience that pretty well ensures a decent hearing for a good new thing. . . . I think I'm with you about *Strife*; it's a great point, about the irony in the action. I find Galsworthy baffling to describe and am always wanting to see more and more of him, so as to find out what he does. He and Masefield seem to me the two biggest things the movement, in England, has thrown up yet, with Granville Barker well up behind them.

To F. F. Montague

June 2, 1911

I don't say Meredith is at his best in the passage you quote, but aren't you, in condemning it, assuming too unqualifiedly that imaginative art *is* to be representative of life? I feel myself working round to the view that the essential aim of an artist is to communicate a kind of excitement of his own, *partly* generated by certain things he sees and hears, and that it is only of secondary importance how far he gives veracious representations of these things in the course of his attempt to convey his excitement to the reader (or spectator, if

it be a picture or play, etc.). In that chapter of *One of Our Conquerors* G. M. does seem to me to communicate a very large portion of the intended emotion, with a relatively small proportion of literal representation of an incident in 'real life'. But this strikes me as a great achievement so long as he succeeds in holding you, just as it is a great achievement for the author of *Job* to communicate to you his excited admiration of a fine stallion by saying that the animal 'sayeth among the spears, "Ha! ha!" '; though the remark is as improbable in the mouth of a stallion as Simeon's repartee is in the mouth of a man electioneering. But though I question the critical canon, I admit that, by any canon, that particular passage of G. M. is a bit off it.

To F. F. Montague

Sept. 29, 1911

I incline to think that the extent of each sex's special ground is generally overrated rather than underrated, and that the whole of the special experience of either sex is well within the possible range of a first-rate artist belonging to the other. And is it scientific to treat individual love-affairs as 'dismissable exceptions'? Aren't they only molecular units or instances of the normal experience of the life of sex?

Meredith seems to me a whacking great poet in *Love in the Valley*, *e.g.* in the lines beginning

> Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping
> Wavy in the dusk lit by one large star.

To F. F. Montague

Nov. 17, 1911

Aren't you inexact—or is uncritical the word?—in implying that Shakspere was describing the notes of

owls and crickets?[1] Wasn't he describing the sounds for which a peculiarly placed and overstrung lady might be imagined as taking them? I should hardly find tragic excellence in the line if Lady Macbeth had succeeded as well as Richard Jefferies in describing the voices of owls and crickets as these strike accurate observers of nature, who have not just committed a murder.

To Francis Dodd

Dec. 19, 1911

I play about with the kiddies a lot just now, and work waits. About a month ago I woke up one morning to find I couldn't be quite sure what year it was and couldn't identify an article I had written the night before. It came all right in a few hours, but I liked the sensation so little that I knocked off all my own little extra work at home for a time and have been luxuriating ever since in doing merely the ordinary day's job of a journalist. But after Christmas I must get to work properly again. If Memory should abandon her Seat for good, I'll certainly come down London way. I remember London, anyway, and the peeler

> with uplifted hand
> Conducting the orchestral Strand,

and the hardy morning air and the chrysoprase dust on sunny afternoons. It's all a dear place and it makes me drunk as soon as I get outside Euston.

VI

During the year he had published *Dramatic Values*. This, as he explains, is a selection of articles, 'or of the

[1] 'I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.'

stuff they are made of', that had come out in the *Manchester Guardian*:

Each is formed by grouping into one loose whole several first-night notices that led to kindred thoughts, or gave or withheld a similar quality of pleasure.

There is one exception, 'The Wholesome Play', which had appeared in the *English Review* after being read to the Manchester Playgoers' Club; and this, we hear, was

delivered in a whisper audible only to those who sat in the first two rows. 'I nearly fainted', I remember Montague saying when it was over; 'the one thing that prevented me was M——'s jolly face beaming at me like a stove!'[1]

The book is inscribed to Mr. Allan Monkhouse, whom he calls in a letter 'my oldest living comrade at this game'. At first, with those reminder copies of *The Manchester Stage* facing him, he had wished for a joint enterprise, with Monkhouse and another colleague. 'Nae publisher', he said, 'shall lay his scaith to me, exclusively; but I am quite game for a combine, with the partners exposing a joint frontage to the enemy.' But in August 1910 he wrote to his friend:

It's chiefly your doing that I make this venture solitary, for I should have thought it assured foolishness and waste until you put me up to it, and it feels beastly lonely now.

[1] 'George Warrington', in *Country Life*, June 16, 1928 (vol. lxiii. p. 895): 'Concerning C. E. Montague'. The whole paper is a valiant tribute to C. E. M., as a great critic who was still ignored in London.

Dramatic Values has now reached several editions, and its quality is well recognised. In one way Montague has few competitors as a critic of the *acted* drama, the most transient of the arts. His book, I mean, is itself very good reading. I wonder whether there are more than a dozen writers on this topic since Aristotle whom it is possible to peruse twice. For your impression of a departed player, or of a play which you may never have seen or only read, or never even read, you depend upon the critic; and it requires a lively skill in the critic if he is not to be fatally boring. One thinks, of course, of figures like Goethe and Lessing; of Dryden, Lamb, and Hazlitt; and of good French workmen like Jules Lemaître. Prominent at home in Montague's day were William Archer and A. B. Walkley, judges both worthy of respect, against whom I shall not try to measure him either *pro* or *con*. But he does contrive to re-animate, in a way given to few except the masters, the vanished scene. The paper on 'Good Acting' is an instance; it is written, and successfully too, in the great Charles Lamb tradition, the most dangerous of all. We who have seen Coquelin *aîné* and the original cast of 'Irish Players' may bear witness to the nicety of the descriptions. There is Coquelin's voice, 'not sweet, but ringing, penetrating, supple, and, at need, megaphonic, or rushing and soaring up rocket-wise', and his face, 'the true comic mask'; and there are the beautiful delivery, the 'action and speech faintly chilled and refined by a touch as of feyness', of the Irish company, and their economy of movement. In a letter Montague speaks of 'Yeats's regiment of Irishes, with lots of standing quiet and just letting the air vibrate, instead of splashing about in it'.

But in the end the great actor comes off pretty well at the hands of the artist-critic. Had ever such actors such monuments as Fielding set up to Garrick, and as Lamb, the head of the whole artist-critic tribe, erected to the shades of Elliston and Munden? It may not be very certain to whom, in the hierarchy of merit, the monuments will go. But, at any rate, every one acting has a ticket in a lottery of some grandeur. He never knows when he may touch the spring of delight in some critic of genius. No doubt everything felt much the same as usual to Rachel on the night when a shy, fiery-eyed, little school-marm, who was to make her immortal, strayed into the house.[1]

The book is of historical value in yet other ways. 'The Well-made Play' is a witty epitaph, not too long, on a crowd of queer dead Victorian comedies, and also deals lethally with Scribe and Augier and Sandeau, not to speak of some still living British playwrights. These notices were worth exhuming, and there must be others on the files that deserve to be saved. They did much to enlighten the public; but, in a weary mood, Montague wrote to Mr. Agate:

Dramatic criticism is really putting a ring through the nose of the public. You get an astonishing amount of grunting and squealing in proportion to the amount of progress achieved.

Moreover, the papers on Ibsen, on Synge, on *L'Avare*, and on Shakespeare show that he was always mining away, if not academically, at the old problems of

[1] From Montague's preface to *The Contemporary Theatre* (1925), by Mr. James Agate, who kindly offers the quotation.

aesthetic; at the effect of tragedy, 'a painless sense of the pressure of somebody's pain'; or at the

Aristotelian conception of matter and form and the unending process of wearing down your matter, making what you leave of it more and more perfectly organic, allowing none of it 'to lie in cold obstruction and to rot', but filling it all with aptness for some function until—far-off, divine event—nothing inorganic, no *mere* matter, is left.

The Oxford training, no doubt, had led to such speculations; and towards the end of his life Montague will be found still musing on the psychology of art, though now in its bearing upon painting and the written word rather than on the theatre. Another passage shows his conception of the critic's business.

It is a good thing for a dramatic critic to know as much as he can of 'the best that has been said and thought' about canons of beauty and truth, and so forth. It is an even better thing, having done so, to be on the alert against regarding himself as a kind of augur, ordained to tell the common man what is what at the theatre, on the strength of this surveying, referring and casting-up business. That way lie pedantry and pretentiousness, unless the augur who inspects the entrails of the particular fowl under review, and compares them with those of an absolute and quintessential fowl laid up in heaven, be a person of most divine modesty and candour.[1]

The two letters that follow form a postscript to *Dramatic Values*. The organ of the Bradford Playgoers'

[1] From the same preface to *The Contemporary Theatre*.

Society, at this date, was a spirited little sheet called *Plays and Playgoers*; and the editor, Mr. Turner, asked leave to reprint the article on Synge. Montague readily granted this, and added:

To T. Turner

Nov. 3, 1913

I think the piece of doctrine that I would always like most to throw at the heads of playgoers is contained in the last words of a paper, in the same book, on 'The Wholesome Play' — I mean the adjuration to them not to be influenced by anybody else, but to practise self-reliance, and even 'you-be-blowedness', in forming their valuations of plays.

In the same journal Mr. Turner had reviewed Mr. Galsworthy's play *The Fugitive*, and had afterwards published a reply to this, from a correspondent signing himself 'Attamen'. Montague, not knowing who had been the reviewer, thought that 'Attamen' might be the editor.

To T. Turner

Dec. 20, 1913

I felt a good deal of sympathy with 'Attamen', and wondered if he was you. I much like and respect Mr. Galsworthy and admire his work, but I sometimes feel, of late, as if he did not give life a chance. He presses the case against it with an insistence that makes one rebel and want to give a verdict in life's favour, even if she be guilty. But his is a most noble and delicate nature, and if anything does ever warp his work it is his own compassionate tenderness, overmuch harassed by the sight of cruelty.

VII

The next letters revert to Lady Macbeth's owl and to natural science in the poets.

To F. F. Montague

Jan. 5, 1912

'Shriek,' quotha. 'Tis 'scream', not because it's better natural history, but because, among other potent reasons, an SCR is wanted for the line

I heard the owl SCReam and the cricketS CRy

And what concern has a poet, or any other artist, with a scientific conscience? A scientific conscience might have kept Job from saying that stars sang together, or that a stallion's neck was clothed with thunder, and so spoilt an excellent piece of workmanship. Tennyson, it seems to me, was often brought into danger of bad work in his art by a hobby about scientific exactitude, but even he had the gumption to present birds in his verse as making cheerful, dreary, hopeful, or desperate sounds according to the mood of the supposed hearer. I have heard that the screech-owl always hoots, as a matter of scientific fact, 'in B flat', but preserve us from a Lady Macbeth who is correct on such points. I could go on like this for a long time, for you draw me on one of my choicest fads by your apparent suggestion that poetry ought to have a shot at the aims of science.

To F. F. Montague

Jan. 10, 1912

Would there were indeed any trace of my lost youth in my escape from the doctrine of the need of a 'scientific conscience' (in the sense of conscientiousness about 'natural' science, ornithology, etc.) in art. It took the

better part of my quarter of a century of grinding at the elements of an art to scour the doctrine out of me. By all means there is a thing that may be called a science of technique, *i.e.*, the kind of acquired 'cuteness that makes Shakspere see how his little kicks with alliterative consonants and assonant vowels will tell. Equally, by all means, it is quite possible for a man to know something of 'natural science' and be a big poet or other artist as well, just as it is possible for him to be a competent billiard-player. But as to there being any need of any artist's having any proficiency in natural history, geology, botany, and the rest of 'em—avaunt the idea, in the name of the good principle of 'keeping things separate', to which you have paid no unworthy homage in times past. . . . Ever your affectionate brother.

To F. F. Montague

April 12, 1912

I can just conceive a meaning for the phrase 'scientific criticism' as applied to, say, the business of putting Shakspere's plays in their order of time by counting up the 'weak endings', 'end-stopt lines', etc., but strictly I should say that the word criticism was only figuratively used in such cases, and in any other cases where the thing is not itself a work of art. Its only difference from other works of art seems to me to be that it is the expression of an emotion about a pre-existing work of art, while they are expressions of emotions, as a rule, about things experienced in 'actual life', as they say.

To F. F. Montague

April 21, 1912

I don't see 'painstaking' so much in [Sir Harry] Lauder as what I take the ancients to have meant by

vis comica; I mean a simple intensification, up to the *n*th power, of ordinary enjoyment of commonplace jokes and personal 'humours'. Do you observe how he sweats when performing? As far as I can see, all that can be done by taking thought is much the same in him as in many other music-hall men, and the difference seems to me to be mainly in the amount of the gusto, or energy of enjoyment, that each brings to his stuff.

To F. F. Montague

May 9, 1912

We hear with dismay that Lauder is in peril of death. If he should really die, after Coquelin and Synge, I should begin to sympathise with the attitude attributed to ——, after his first wife's death following that of a near relative, when with one final remonstrance he is said to have dismissed the idea of a deity, or at any rate of one worth supplication, for ever. . . .

B. being taxed with dirty hands by a music-mistress the other day, held them up, gazed at them solemnly, and said, 'They are clean in my sight', like a forgiving divinity.

In the summer Montague went again to Switzerland; and the letters show the kind of exultation that was soon to pass into *The Morning's War*. 'The mountains', he wrote, 'hold me very tight, especially the Alps.'

To Francis Dodd

July 23, 1912

We came back last Thursday from our four weeks in the Alps, pretty fit and lean after some climbing that was as good for the body and the soul as ever. After 11 months here I want to go out and do something

violent, the way dogs want to eat grass, and there is the deuce's own medicinal virtue in being done up and scorched and funked now and then and brought back to the primitive hardships and joys of physical self-dependence—or at least in playing at it. I come back feeling like Longfellow's Evangeline when 'homeward serenely she walked with God's benediction upon her' after going to church. It's a rum thing that one simply loathes the mountains in some ways, for their beastly, dead-white blinding snow and drab, dirt-coloured rocks and their everlasting muck-heaps of moraines, and yet one is really in love—one aches with desire at 'em, though they're termagants.

To F. F. Montague

Feb. 26, 1913

I always adored Swift and have copied him more than anyone except Goldsmith. I never could see much trace of any particular race's infirmities in him, though he is a great man at making his critics, of various races, bring out theirs. Thackeray on him is only rivalled by Charlotte Brontë on the wicked French [Belgians?].

To F. F. Montague

March 11, 1913

Liberalism (as observable in England) does not strike me as notably English, so much of it is still fresh from the French Revolution, and so many of the best exponents are Irish or Scotch. The Pater always seems to me the best Liberal, in the English sense, that I have known, and Campbell-Bannerman, Dillon, and my father-in-law the three next best, and the four had, perhaps, enough English blood between them to irrigate one rather anaemic Englishman.

To F. F. Montague

April 4, 1913

I forget whether I sent you, a year or so ago, a long paper read to the Classical Association, by some pundit,[1] on Catullus as a Celt. I wondered whether the scent would be followed up. I used to like Catullus fairly, but Horace better—partly, I fancy, because he was so mixed up, in my mind, with the Pater's gusto for him, and partly because his eighteenth-century mind seems to me of the kind easiest for Irishmen to enter into. See, for example, how ——— talks Dr. Johnsonese by nature and Bernard Shaw writes a kind of Smollett in his rotting arguments. I quite feel that Yeats and the crepuscularists are very Irish too, but the plain early afternoon daylight of Horace and Goldsmith and Steele 'sets the genius' of the race too.

To Francis Dodd

April 15, 1913

It's good to have seen F. Robertson's Hamlet, for Heaven knows when we shall see as fine a one of its kind; though I love one like the old Irving's better—all over faults but a regular globe of passion and romance with huge subterranean caverns and flames of fire inside it.

VIII

For three years past Montague, in his scanty leisure, had been planning out and writing *The Morning's War*;

[1] Identity uncertain. Prof. D. A. Slater suggests several candidates, of whom the late Kuno Meyer is possibly one. Prof. Slater had referred to the theory, in passing, in a paper of his own (Feb. 2, 1912) to the Association, quoting Meyer as his authority. C. E. M. probably alludes to this.

and this, which he called his first 'non-farcical yarn', was published in 1913. The staple was no longer to be satire. 'It is so much easier', he wrote, 'to make people ridiculous, when one wants, than to keep them from being ridiculous when one does not want.' The strain, in fact, is almost throughout serious, and uplifted; the atmosphere, in the opening chapters, is sharp and rare; it is that of the mountains among which the scene is laid. The detail of the hard and risky climb of the two young people with their guide was carefully pondered over. The actual place was one the author knew. They were to 'go up a ridge something like the N.E. ridge of Mt. Collon', ascended from Arolla. The pair had to be 'left alone with their guide', and the lady's brother dropt, for the purposes of the story. 'The climb itself, objectively-like, was all written last autumn [1909]; but it has to be re-done now [1910] subjectively, as seen partly through *her* eyes in her state of mind.' The seam, however, is not visible, and this Alpine adventure is as vivid and precise as anything of the kind that I can think of in fiction.

The Morning's War, though not to be called an imitative book, shows some signs of the author's reading. It is not like Stevenson, whom he studied much and often reviewed, if by no means always with favour; yet the search for rarity of phrase, for the exact word, which Stevenson practised, is evident enough. Also the mood of exaltation and the experimenting in epigram suggest a study of Meredith. The girl June is a Meredithian girl, a heroine, physically brave, and portrayed with much eloquent and sometimes difficult psychology. This heightened and at times almost dizzy style befits

the descriptions of the Alps, of the black town, of the Irish scenery, and of the Catholic Church service. It does not always come right in the talk, which can be unreal and is oddly different from the natural and flowing letters in which Montague so modestly thanks his friends. He would never republish the story, and to the last cherished the idea of recasting it. He thought too ill of the 'structure', which is sound enough, except for one episode. The subject is also excellent: the youth is the son of a priest who has broken away and married; June, however, is a Catholic. While among the priests in Ireland, he finds out his parentage, and how it is regarded; feels that he cannot be the man for June; thinks that she does not know his origin; and forces himself to feign brutally that he does not care for her. But she does come to know the secret, and loves him all the same; and all ends well. This is a sound, watertight plot, simple enough; and the accident with the arrow, which leads the youth wrongly to imagine that he is dying, is not wanted. It should be added that all the scenes and persons are imaginary. Doubtless the subject of a priest who for conscience' sake renounces his orders was suggested by the author's family history; but a comparison of this with the book shows that the rest is pure fiction. One character indeed, who is not concerned with religion at all, the literary Mr. Hathersage, is 'taken from life'.[1] The best drawn figure, the orthodox and sympathetic Father Power, has no known original. I have lingered over *The Morning's War* because, with all its drawbacks, it is full of fire, and it is packed with intelligence of a rare kind, which would fit out a

[1] See p. 24 above.

dozen ordinary novels of talent. How little this is a 'novel with a purpose' may be seen from a letter:

To Percy McDougall

My line is rather to show that with a particular couple of decent moderns it [the Church of Rome] and its powers come to precious little when up against a natural affection. Or rather I don't want to show anything in the way of an estimate of public institutions, but merely an isolated case which may be typical, or may be unique, for all that it concerns me as its inventor.

To Francis Dodd

Sept. 7, 1913

I've never written to thank you for your letter about my yarn. Thank you kindly. It was better to me than all the reviews ever written and it cheered me to think you had felt parts of the thing right. It's quite true about the Alpine part, which is worked on and fussed at until it's far past its best. I let myself be too much bothered there by the fear of not being precise and topographical enough for a reader starting in with his imagination cold. The Irish part came more easily, because I had to give it as seen through a particular character's eye in a particular mood, and that gives one a lift towards some sort of unity. But O Lord! the construction of it all! The way I bring in characters for nothing except just to make one page readable or help somebody else to say something! And the way it's all huddled up and scurried through towards the end! I half knew I was guilty of scamping the architecture all the time, and so I was always trying to make the surface of each little bit shiny, so as to amuse the reader and keep his eye off the bigger things; as if bluffing a few

readers could square one's own conscience. I must have a go, next time, at a real structure that will stand up, all steel frame and first quality concrete, and not leave it to the encrustations to hold the whole building together. It will give the encrustations a chance, too, to get tranquilly right in their own way.

To Percy Withers

Sept. 19, 1913

It warms a shivering author's heart to have praise like yours. It's enormously too generous, of course, but that you were taken at all by any of the parts that I had been moved in writing is real joy. I had formed beastly cowardly habits by writing a previous yarn altogether under the shelter of irony, which is an ignoble thing when used alone, and when it came to letting on about undisguised enthusiasms of my own, in telling this new story—about mountains and decent journalism and clean love and so on—it seemed like an indecent shrieking out of one's heart from the house-tops—as if that were not what anyone must do who tries to be an artist.

I wish the book read more easily. It evidently doesn't, and I adore lucidity whole-heartedly and rage against Meredith and James for foregoing it, and I sweated like anything to make the thing run clear without being other than what I meant. Probably one reason why it seems unrestful is that I was always in a deadly funk lest that page or sentence should be the last that a reader would stand, and so I was continually trying, in a panic-stricken way, to make the texture of each paragraph shiny in itself, so as to diddle him into reading on. What imperturbable gods they are that like Hardy, and, in his degree, Arnold Bennett, can disregard these temptations and rely on the whole of a book to tell like one stroke. . . .

The Gissing enterprise[1] was a most valiant attempt at the impossible, I fear. How it drew all the stupid and vulgar souls! But there were joys like the outburst of ——. . . . He had seemed once a bumptious Philistine, and, behold, there he was, humane and generous and understanding—the sort of revelation from which one is always getting encouragement.

To Percy McDougall

Oct. 14, 1913

Thank you warmly for your letter about my book [*The Morning's War*]. It is the first one in which I have tried, except indirectly and ironically, to cry up the ideas and valuations that I care most about, and it is the keenest pleasure and encouragement to know that you and Mrs. McDougall, who judge things for yourselves, feel that the book is on the right side.

A letter of eight years later shows him planning a revision:

To Arthur Rogers

MY DEAR SIR, *Aug.* 30, 1921

Thank you kindly for your letter. It would be well worth while to write books if they always made such letters come. I rather hope that you liked the latter end of my *Morning's War* less than my other books, for it was a failure. I think the beginning was good, but then my plot became more than I could manage—I never really imagined, in all their poignancy, the things that people would be feeling in such troubles as those of my

[1] Committee formed by Dr. Withers for a memorial to George Gissing, who had died in 1903. The response might have been better; but the result was a tablet by Mr. Eric Gill, appropriately set in a corridor of the Owens College, Manchester, the scene of some of Gissing's early troubles.

young man and woman. Some day, when there is time, I will try to put the right end to the story and then I hope you will think it better. . . . Believe me, yours sincerely.

IX

A few letters must fill up the first seven months of 1914; they do not foreshadow the coming strain.

To F. F. Montague

March 4, 1914

I have become dreadfully disconnected from *Don Quixote* for a quarter of a century, through two or three failures to get the right translation—the one which we had at home, and of which you rightly cherish the ruins. Wasn't it Jarvis's? If I had always had it, and our old translation of the *Arabian Nights*, and the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, I should not have read much else since I began to work for a living. I am dead sure that 'intensive' and not extensive reading is the right kind, especially for anyone in the writing trade.

To F. F. Montague

[*Undated*]

I find Meredith the most sanguine of all writers, with a real sanguineness of to-day and not a mere laboured effort to think there may be some ground for cheerfulness left in beliefs that people don't seriously hold any longer. To have taken in the whole evolutionary business, with all that it implies, and to find it all as sure a ground for radiant delight in everything that happens to us as St. Francis found in the Christian legend of his day—this really seems to me the most magnificent triumph of the spirit of life and joy.

To F. F. Montague

May 22, 1914

I don't feel Parnell to be much let down in my estimation by reading the extracts and summaries that I've seen of the book [Mrs. O'Shea's], it being a matter of history that the great are as uncritical as the little when in love, and as sure to give themselves away. He was a strange, romantic beggar in all the little I saw of him in 1890 [1891]—enormously more so than anyone else that I have ever met, even when I was a kiddy and T—— E—— was a mysterious terror.

To Allan Monkhouse

April 10, 1914

It [a son's experience at school] raises all sorts of questions in one's mind in new ways—I mean whether one ought to be thankful for such direction as a boy gets *pro tem.* from conventional enthusiasms, or whether one ought to be worried lest he's losing his individual autonomy for ever and beginning to lapse into the gregarious, hopeless, timid Public-School-Man type that one knows, and so on. What makes one hope is that the ones who have any guts, like —— and ——, react sooner or later.

To F. F. Montague

June 4, 1914

Don't parents often get blamed too much for over-influencing their children, when the blame should mostly lie on the children for not kicking more strenuously against influence? I can see already that it will be almost impossible not to try to propel the kiddies in directions (professional, etc.) that interest me, but I

pray that they may be armed against me with contumacy when the right time comes.

His next book, *Disenchantment*, was not to appear, as a whole, until 1922; his next work of fiction, *Fiery Particles*, in 1923. The war came between, and was to be the making of Montague as a writer. After he joined the army he dropped all press work until his discharge; and during the war his only signed publications were the articles and notes in *The Western Front* and in its various sequels. Just before enlisting he expressed his feeling that a new volume of his life was now to open.

To Francis Dodd

Dec. 8, 1914

It's a good job if you can work. I can't, till the war is over. I'm rapidly growing, after a pause of 27 years, and I must wait to see what sort of person the final adult is, before I can have him writing any more books, at any rate. I first-drafted a new yarn last year and the first half of this, but now it's hopelessly pre-war and inexperienced and only fit to shave with.

Happiness has no history, and little has been said of Montague's unusually happy family life, which was now during four years to be interrupted except for his snatches of leave. Whilst away, he wrote constantly, as will appear, to his wife. In his war diaries he repeatedly notes the successive birthdays. One of his close associates observed that he spoke of her and their children on very few occasions, but adds that

on these few occasions his genuine love and affection for each and every one of them was remarkable, and I

came to the conclusion that they were never out of his thoughts.

Here, then, it may be timely to quote some evidence, which speaks for itself, furnished by his eldest son, Mr. Evelyn Montague. The reader of *Rough Justice* will not be surprised at Montague's sympathy with young people or at the lucky streak of boyishness in his composition.

To his children he spoke very seldom about right and wrong, and indeed there was no need; none of us could help seeing what he thought of truth and kindness and courage. But we could not fully realise the passion for noble living which coloured all his thoughts. To us he was the rare rebuker of our transgressions and the eternal source of jest and laughter and violent exciting games. I never met anybody who was better company, for child and man alike. He talked as he wrote; of all the quotations with which his work is inlaid, there are hardly any that I had not heard him use in his daily speech before I was ten years old. He never laid himself out to be interesting or instructive; what made him such a delightful companion was his unquenchable sense of fun. A friend of my childhood wrote to me lately, paying homage to him as an artist; but he wrote more feelingly of a twenty-year-old memory of my father, devilishly attired and with a blackened face, making strange animal noises for the fearful delight of a children's party. I have a vivid memory of his reading aloud to us Kipling's story, 'My Sunday at Home', a reading much interrupted in order that reader and listeners might roll together on the floor in paroxysms of mirth. It was a sight to see him playing cricket with his children; he might control himself enough to deal the ball only a moderate blow, but then, with what

earth-shaking bounds would he plunge down the pitch, while some excited youngster scoured the plain to save a second run! And how hugely did he chuckle when the run-out was just achieved or just avoided! He adored all games, and one of the few occasions on which, as a child, I remember hearing him speak scornfully was when he told me of some misguided mortal who spoke of playing tennis 'for exercise'. I mingled my scorn with his; to speak of cake as just a food were not a more fatuous blindness to the bounty of Providence.

His passion for climbing is, of course, well known, and he was a great walker and cyclist. In his boyhood at Twickenham, by untold economies, he saved up enough money to buy himself a canoe, and thereafter explored the Thames for miles; and at Oxford he found in rowing a joy which is reflected in many of his writings. But any activity, mental or physical, could absorb him; a game of patience, or the weeding of the garden were to him joyous adventures.

But of course his greatest passion was for writing. He never spoke of his work to us except in terms of a difficult and enchanting search for an unattainable perfection, in which he was moving slowly forward. His feeling for it he used to compare sometimes to the craving of a drug-taker; his study drew him like a magnet. He was often conscious of having failed in regard to the psychological development of his characters and the like, but if the writing was honestly done, his chief desire was fulfilled. In his writing he was indeed the 'rapt amateur of profitless zeal', and happy to be no more than that.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE RANKS

I

IN 1917, in *The Western Front*, Montague was to write:

> To have had a part in this war will deepen in most men the feeling that war is a thing first to be avoided by every honourable means and then to be won by every honourable means. Of avoiding this war there is no question now. All that ended in 1914.

This also had been his view during the critical first days of August 1914. The *Manchester Guardian* had urged with vehemence that England could and should honourably avoid entering the war; it had, as Montague said in a letter, 'for weeks been ingeminating peace'. I do not know at what date he came to feel sure, as undoubtedly he did, that peace would have been impossible. On and after August 5, he was sure that now that we were in the fray, we must stay in and fight through. In this opinion he never wavered. Herein he was simply one with his kind, with the mass of the nation and with the army. Soon he was strongly convinced that our presence in the war was not only righteous, but essential to success, and that either civilisation or the German must prevail.[1] It will appear later how he answered his

[1] So his leading articles in *M.G.*, Aug. 24, 'Europe must either smash Prussian Junkerdom or be smashed by it,' etc.; and Sept. 28, 'War broke out, and broke out just when it did, because Germany wanted it to' (on the question of 'immediate' responsibility).

own painful questionings as to whether or no war is consistent with the teaching of Christ.

Meanwhile he had to settle what to do with himself; and he went through two months of severe mental stress. In August he wrote that he 'admired the Belgian heroism', and said, 'What I bar most in the Germans is their apparent beastliness towards non-combatants'. A subsequent letter is expressive:

To Allan Monkhouse

Sept. 17, 1914

Do you find the war an absolute disabler to any coherent effort of your mind? I do. I can't write, can't think connectedly, can't get the idea of anything with any fullness. I simply piffle through the whole of every day, only kep' up by reading paperful after paperful of war news down to the most obviously drivelling.

His decision, though it can never have been really in doubt, was even harder than it was for thousands of the younger husbands and fathers who went in. He was forty-seven, with a wife and with seven children under age. Like most other men of the new armies, he had no military training; and, like them, he had to consider his employment. His paper would lose his service; he thought that he had no moral claim to a salary during absence, or to his place being kept open for him should he survive the war. But these last difficulties were cleared, in the spirit that might be expected. A business arrangement was made, satisfactory to all. However long he might be away, his post awaited him whenever he should come back; and there would then be, wrote

Mr. Scott, 'joy in the corridor and in all our hearts'. Needless to say how much it meant to Montague that his wife was entirely at one with him and upheld his determination to go. During those months, in countless households and offices, such issues were being faced and met in a similar spirit; but the conditions in this case were somewhat unusual and seem worth recording.

An undated poem perhaps reflects the feelings of this period.

THE HOPE

Like men that were dreaming of finer
  Refinings of ease and delight
Till they woke in a gashed liner
  That bellowed for help in the night,

We hardly prized the earth, so cold
  It had caked, and still, and tame;
But it melted, and hot at our feet was the old
  Whirling ball of flame.

To feel, with unperturbed breath,
  His world's arch rock, to mark
Containedly the hoofs of death
  Beat nearer through the dark—

While each man thought 'Not mine to win
  That far', the gates of strife
Flew open and he stood within
  The burning heart of life.

We have not earned the hope to make
  Our little souls so great,
Yet be the miracle ours—to take
  The leap of that high fate.

In October he had made up his mind to join either with a commission or in the ranks, whichever were the quicker way. The process took a little time, owing to his age.

To F. F. Montague

Oct. 27, 1914

At the office we begin to hear of colleagues who departed as second lieutenants in August now blossoming into captains and what not. One of our dramatic critics has got to the war as an interpreter, another man is driving a motor ambulance, several have enlisted, and all the rest want to be war correspondents. My own slender chance of ever seeing any of the fun depends on the remote possibility of Kitchener's accepting a battalion of 1000 fit and hardy old cocks of 45 or more, of whom I am one, who have been picked, for their wind and limb, out of about 3000 vessels of mature ardour, and are now awaiting his pleasure. Probably he will say he will be blowed if he spends time in drilling us old crocks as long as the striplings of 38 continue to come in.

In November he applied, though without success, to enter the new Irish Brigade, as a private; it was clear by now that enlistment was to be the best chance. This alternative, in itself, he seems to have preferred.

To C. P. Scott

Nov. 24, 1914

I have felt for some time, and especially since I have been writing leaders urging people to enlist, a strong wish to do the same myself. I wrote last week to the War Office to ask if there was any chance of getting over

the difficulty of my few years over the limit of age, and I was told that although the W.O. could not directly break the rule itself, it did not veto exceptions made by those responsible for the raising of new battalions locally.

Another month had to be passed marking time:

To Percy Withers

Dec. 8, 1914

It is no good to try to write anything now. One is growing too furiously all the time—in the curious way one does grow during the beastliest calamities—and heaven knows what one will be, or of what shape, when the forcing is over. I feel that everything I ever wrote is hopelessly pre-war now—that I had no experience when I wrote it.

My only present distraction from the continuous effort of re-arranging all my old ideas is to play at being a special constable in a police station yard off Deansgate. I have a badge and a warrant and am promised a bludgeon. Great times.

Somehow he got himself accepted. On December 23 he was able to enlist in the 24th (Service) Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (the 'Sportsman's Battalion'), and on the 29th to join up at the Hotel Cecil. We hear his protests against

. . . the accepted literary view of enlistment for a war as an enormously painful sacrifice—a view cried out against by all one's experience of soldiers and others when presented with a chance of participation in a scrap. Not once, but four times, have I seen the ugly rush in a newspaper office for the few available jobs of war correspondence at the opening of the war—and a war correspondent can only be hit, and must not hit

back, so that it is but a demi-scrap for him. 'Si rixa est, ubi tu pulsas, ego vapulo tantum',[1] as my friend Juvenal says.

The battalion of hoary ancients in which I am enrolled is making desperate efforts to overcome the reluctance of the War Office to be bothered with us.

Montague, like other volunteers, went in with a will, in the plain spirit of patriotism. But besides, he had always cared for France, and thought that her culture, not that of Germany, was the central culture of Europe. He is thought to have been, and may well have been, impressed by Arnold's excellent little book on *German Ambitions*;[2] and now he said: 'What I particularly like is to see the really quite stupid deference of other nations to Germany's supposed intellectual primacy getting dissolved'.[3] But throughout the war he distinguished between the ordinary German, whether in peace or in battle, and the militant caste; and he was furious when, after the Armistice, he saw in Germany any insolence of the conqueror towards the civilian. Still he wanted, like the rest, to fight; as will appear, he had a taste for danger; and he had a passion which even the mountains could not satisfy for any fresh enterprise, and, in a word, for more life. Also, with his gift and training, of a kind rare among soldiers, he was able to find words for the new experience. All the time, he

[1] 'If a fray it be, when you give the knocks and I only take them' (*Sat.* iii. 289).

[2] *German Ambitions as they affect Great Britain and the U.S. of America*, by 'Vigilans sed Aequus' (1903); enlarged, with notes, from articles in the *Spectator*.

[3] So in *M.G.*, Nov. 24, 1914, on Treitschke, who suffered from the 'solemn, didactic, highly instructed intoxication of a tremendous pundit', etc.

kept his head and remained as far from the cranky pacifist as from the yellow newspapers.

II

The Press, after Montague's death, seized on the fact that in order to pass muster he dyed his grey hair yellow; in English, in German, in Swedish, and in Dutch the story was repeated. The deception must have been obvious; and the grey hair was itself deceptive. He was wiry, much younger than his years, very 'fit', and presently to become fitter. At first he was in London, and there is gaiety in his letters.

To Allan Monkhouse

17 Vincent Square, Westminster,
Dec. 29, 1914

Thank you much for your letter. It's really all humdrum at present—very healthy and pleasant and a regular rest-cure for anyone whose work is to sit at a desk and hoist ideas about. The sergeant of my company, when adjuring us to-day to do everything more vehemently, encouraged us by saying, 'I can assure you that four months ago I was as pot-bellied as any of you'. They marched us all about the City to-day to prove that no Alderman need despair. Still it *was* rather a scandal by which I scraped in and it wouldn't bear much looking into. It is quite settled now that I stay in the 'Sportsman's Battalion'—as it is called because everybody in it has great tales of what he used to do at some game or other, years ago. We expect to go into camp in about a fortnight, and they encourage wonderful hopes of our getting out to Belgium in three months if we are very good. It feels quite shameful to be spending the days in

agreeable exercises and evolutions (like learning to skate, only not so horribly difficult), acquiring appetite and sleepiness, while you are all seriously working. But it is enormously interesting and one gets to see all sorts of things in new ways.

From his lodging bedroom, where the candle gave him little light for writing, he repaired in the evening to the 'office' of the Alpine Club:

No one else in Club. Wind making noises outside in the darkened London and rain splashing. Wind has just blown ashes out of the grate on to the carpet. Seems like a night alone in an Alpine hut.

He notes various humours, including the 'inexpressible competence' of the sergeant-major,[1] who

makes wonderfully good allocutions on soldierly duty, manful, earnest, ungushing, full of rough comradeship, good sense, and knowledge of mankind. 'The 'ole! the 'ole! didn't you 'ear me say the 'ole?' 'God A'mighty! if there isn't a man has turned left-about!'

Corporal's comment at end of somewhat egoistic first lecture by adjutant on musketry, in which he has recurred often to his own great feats as a rifle-shot: 'Call that a lecture! Why, it's pers'nal 'ist'ry'.

Having asked yesterday for a railway pass to Blackwater and Yorktown, instead of Camberley, I asked my section corporal if I should give much bother by asking to have it changed. He said it would, rather. 'Better try a bit of diplomacy at the railway station—say your Sergeant-Major has made the pass out wrong. That's diplomacy, that is. Say another feller did it wrong.'

[1] These scenes, and those in Wiltshire, are recalled in *Rough Justice*, ch. xvii.

Major reads Army Act to B Company, with notes and explanations, *e.g.* 'That's fairly hot', after list of death punishments. Heinousness, in soldiers, of saying 'Go to Hell' to a corporal, though natural to the ordinary man. Suggests that civilian's hat may be removed by other means than by kicking if he does not take it off at 'God save the King'.

Life seems much simpler when it is lived with no thought except that of obeying orders; and some verses written in the higher mood seem to connect themselves with these experiences.

Men scaling with taut finger-tips
An Alpine needle's side
Find there the mazy ways of earth
Divinely simplified.

No questioning about the things
That human life might be
Vex him whose every fibre clings
To mere life manfully.

All hope and all ambition live
Along one outstretched arm;
All life within him leaps to guard
Its mortal case from harm.

So in this hour of falling skies
And shaken certainties
Above old glooms of doubt there rise
Some such simplicities.

No more tormented lest we hoard
Things not worth having, or
Lest some far goal we struggle toward
Be not worth wishing for,

We shed the last and fondest doubt
And see with life's own eyes
Her passionate purpose, and without
One pang of sacrifice

Back to the mother who gave we give
Her darling gift of breath,
Exulting to be free to live
In her escape from death.

He felt 'complete peace of mind as a private'; but after three months was

engaged in a desperate and doubtful competition with an ex-liftman at the Metropole Hotel for a lance-corporalship, which is but a more august form of the easy existence of a private.

This step he attained after reaching (March 17) Hare Hall Camp, near Romford, where he greatly enjoyed himself ('Swedish drill and running in early morning. Many men faint. Not really hard work; I love it').

To Allan Monkhouse

June 1, 1915

Just don't I like to hear about anything and everything at the office and in Manchester! The Manchester news is almost the only thing that I read in the paper. I always look eagerly at the theatre notices and the advertisements in the little time that is free from one or other of our simple occupations. I have not opened a book, except drill and musketry manuals, since we came here, and the idea of writing anything seems fantastic, though one is almost choked with the mass of curious, strange, amusing things that there are to

describe. You can imagine what a feast it is to live day and night, in a smallish barn when not on parade, with 29 people wildly different from one another in every way and utterly unable to disguise their characters under all the little tests we are put to by this pigging together. Everybody knows who shirks the job of washing greasy plates in cold water. If Arnold Bennett were here, he would spend all the time in putting down what some of the men say, and our great controversies at night about all manner of things are so delicious that I am tempted to encourage them long after 'Lights Out', at ten o'clock, in spite of the thought of reveille at five. . . .

Yesterday I declined, with some misgiving, an offer, which was made to all the N.C.O.'s here, of work as a sergeant in the West African Frontier Force—a matter of drilling Houssa recruits, somewhere near Timbuctoo, I fancy. We were all rather torn between the chance of immediate service abroad and the fear of being stuck up somewhere on the Congo for the rest of the war, perhaps in profound peace. So only about eight out of 200 of us took the thing on. Here the nearest we come to any contact with the war is the occasional sound of a little flight of aircraft whirring over the camp like wild geese a little before dawn, and the scurrying of motors with anti-aircraft guns on them along the London-Brentford road.

A photograph presents the 'housemaid' of 'Hut 17' wearing a cowl-like cap, which gives him a monastic appearance. Another letter shows Montague's relish for ordinary things and persons, and I quote it, and more such passages hereafter, for that reason. Most of the writers who served in the war, and especially the poets, set down either their exceptional moods, or else the striking and dreadful things they saw, but they seldom

tell you how they lived; while the common soldier is no hand at describing the common round in trained English. Montague does this; and if anyone thinks it easy to do well, let him try.

To Francis Dodd

HUT 17, HARE HALL CAMP, ROMFORD,
May 2, 1915

It's a great life here and I am as fit as a prizefighter. Last week we were digging trenches all day and every day, and it is fine, satisfying work, and the completed trench, with all its little cunning contraptions, a joy to its creators. We get up at 5.30, go by train to the scene of our labours, with a piece of bread in each man's haversack and six tins of bully beef to each company, eat our dinner on the grass and come home at 5.30 in the evening to wash ourselves and clean our kit and gear for next day, and get to sleep. Last night a nightingale started executing masterpieces in a tree over this hut, just after 'Lights Out', and we all lay still to listen to it; but none of us could remember, this morning, that he had heard more than a minute or two of the singing. . . . Very sorry you are feeling off it. I want to see a lot of clipping things of yours when I come back to civil life again. I advance at a sober pace in my new profession, and am a lance-corporal now, which feels at first like being a field-marshal and gives me the occasional command of eight men and the right to wear side-arms when I go out of camp on my own, as well as exemption from all the housemaiding jobs of a hut-orderly, which I rather enjoyed when my turn for them came.

In June he was at Clipston Camp, Notts, a lance-sergeant now, 'with all sorts of intricate duties and

" HUT 17," 1915

rituals to behave correctly in'. It is, he declares, 'a great adventure, and I get two bob a day'; and in high spirits he writes:

To Allan Monkhouse

24TH (SERVICE) BATTN., ROYAL FUSILIERS,
CLIPSTON CAMP, NOTTS, *July* 28, 1915

I am a beast not to have written sooner, for it was a joy to get your letter, but I have never been so busy in my life as during the last few weeks. I am a sergeant now, with all sorts of intricate duties and rituals to behave correctly in; and it is the sacred army tradition that you are not to be told beforehand how to perform new duties, but are to find out by committing all the possible blunders, and some that are almost impossible, in trying to do them as you would in a new-made world of your own. But it is a great adventure and I earn two bob a day, on which I can live well and have plenty to eat, and eat it on a tablecloth too. We have nearly finished our brigade training (the second stage) here and are to move to Salisbury Plain next week for the divisional, or final, stage, after which we are told that we may hope to go out either to Flanders or the Dardanelles. It is a good healthy life here, with about 18 miles marching and three or four hours manœuvring or drilling on most days, and it is a wild joy to get away from parade-ground niceties to the freer movement of field-days in big hilly heather, where one can get into more human relations with one's little commando, who are all charming curiosities.

The next move was on August 4 to Kandahar Barracks, Tidworth Camp, on Salisbury Plain; and here, though in England, was to be his first casualty.

In September he was full sergeant; and his love of cricket may have been detected.

To Allan Monkhouse

TIDWORTH, *Sept.* 18, 1915

I have found a hobby in bomb-throwing, which unites the joy of bowling googlies and playing with fireworks, and the hope of annoying the Germans if we can get our bombs in fust. Behold me Grenadier-Sergeant and free to wear on my sleeve two flaming squibs, done in wool, like the fiery swords at the gate of Paradise in an Italian primitive's picture. I feel as full of wicked pride as Pepys when he had cleaned out his attic and wrote in the Diary, 'God grant my mind run not too much upon it'. You should see Salisbury Plain if you don't know it—though of course you do, through reading Hardy, whom one feels to have made it all and made it very good.

And again he writes:

To Francis Dodd

TIDWORTH, *Sept.* 18, 1915

No officer am I, but a plodding Grenadier-Sergeant, or ringleader of bomb-throwers. We study little plans for working along German trenches, causing as much annoyance as we can with a crafty combination of bayonets and hand-grenades, both of which now seem to me much more satisfying implements than I should have thought beforehand. They say we are to go to France on or about Oct. 6, which is M.'s birthday, so that I couldn't have wished a better-omened day for starting real work after all these months of technical education. . . .

Don't grieve—though I know it's no use writing that—at not being in arms. It isn't men that are wanted most—it's rifles and training materials and teachers and some sort of system in managing things, and some humble-mindedness all round in believing that unless we try harder all round this time than our army ever had to do before, we shall be smashed. Heaps of soldiers of all ranks go on shirking and slacking and boozing through their time just because they can't frame the tremendous idea that it's not sure we aren't going to be smashed.

To Allan Monkhouse

TIDWORTH, *Sept.* 18, 1915

The *M.G.* is fine, and it glads me to see the theatre notices growing longer as autumn sets in, and the books bearing up so well against all the noisy distractions. I've seen at least one quite good poem about the war, one by 'A. E.' reprinted from the *Times*. I've hardly read anything else of his, and had thought he must be too twilit for my poor eyes, but this poem was quite legible, and, methought, a beauty, and full of pungent veracity about the difficulty of squaring Christianity with war. I never felt it could be done, but that we must beat the Germans whether it can or not. . . .

III

On October 18 he had an alarming mishap which kept him in hospital for a month.

I had the rotten luck to be blown up while instructing our Grenade company in bombing; and a month in hospital, spent in growing a nice new skin for my face and hands, new eyelashes, eyebrows, moustache and

other ornaments, left me so disgustingly weak that they banished me from the front, to get fit here if I can. So I am exiled both from England and from my own lot out here; but 'Si fortuna me tormente, sperato me contento', as Pistol says.

This accident was of a kind only too common: he was told later that perhaps half of the grenadier-sergeants were badly hurt in practice. Mr. Bernard Shaw, who heard the story from him in January 1917, writes that then 'there was no visible trace of this adventure left'. But it was a near thing; Montague describes the affair, writing home soon after it; and it is clear that as usual he had kept cool and carried on.

To his Wife

This is written with 3 fingers of my left hand, which have now been set free. I am going on splendidly. The surgeon says I shall be on parade in a fortnight, and my burns pain very little now.

I was in the middle of a group of 30 men, instructing them, and there was a bag of 12 lbs. of gunpowder in front of my right foot. Some spark must have reached it. There was not a great report, but a strong flame. The 5 of us who were nearest had our uniforms charred black, and all the exposed skin of hands and faces more or less burnt. One sergeant, Day, was stooping and caught it in the eyes, but they are sure that he is not blind.

I was pushed back by the explosion and came down on one knee but not further. When I looked round I saw half-a-dozen men on the ground in great pain and another half-dozen not much better off. I remembered that a week ago I had put away in our 'dug-out', close by, a bottle of salad oil to clean rifles with, so I ordered

this to be got out and the burns of the patients to be smeared with it, while messengers ran down to fetch ambulances. I felt nothing of the state of shock that is supposed to come from burns and I was able easily to walk back to barracks. I lost the skin of both palms, of the back of the right hand, the right cheek, part of the forehead, and a few odd places here and there. I am also short of an eyelash, and moustache (no loss), and a little hair, and the surgeon thinks I shall remain elegantly tattooed up the back of the right cheek and right hand, where some of the powder was blown in. Your dear watch kept time steadily through the whole shindy, while others were stopping and partly melting.

The real trouble is that, whatever fired the powder, I ought to have had it in a safe place. I suppose I shall be strafed for it more or less, but a good sign is that all the officers who have come to see us, including the C.O., have been extremely amiable to me. Anyhow, as nobody has been killed or blinded, I can easily stick any row that may come of it. Where the skin of my face is not properly burnt it is blackened as in the Alps. It is rather sweetly reminiscent.

He was not strafed, which was a relief; but he dreaded much more being kept at home by his hurts. Again he got his way, evaded sick leave, and contrived to be out of hospital within a month, in time to go out with the battalion.

I don't mind a few more days' delay, as it gives time to clear up a few last raw spots on one hand. I really came off quite luckily in our little bust-up, and our Colonel seems to regard me humorously as something between an illegitimate survival and an unexpected recruit. To my relief I have been promoted a step in the hierarchy of sergeants. I feared I might be strafed

by a court-martial for not having prevented such an irregularity and I take my step as a kind of amnesty.

I grieved most really about Dixon Scott.[1] I did not know him well, but the extinction of all that boundless energy and eagerness of delight in our art and its subjects seems dreadful and foully wasteful.

IV

On November 16 he landed at Havre. But he had moved too soon, in his eagerness, without proper rest; the hand was not healed, and the sores were a barometer for the bitter weather. A letter written some months later gives his first impressions of the scene.

To his Wife

April 2, 1916

We got a feed of cheese and army biscuit in the early morning, were at Havre about four, and disembarked just before sunrise on a stormy morning with the snow beginning to fall. There were German prisoners at work on the quays. Like all the other German prisoners I've seen since they looked not sorry to be out of the hurly-burly; but it must be awful to be a prisoner—any death you can meet in war must be better, except for the hope of seeing friends again at some distant time. As we marched the two miles to camp, with great-coats on and our blankets, ground-sheets, change of underclothes, cleaning-kit and private possessions in our packs and haversacks, and the rifle and 120 rounds of ammunition to make up the load, I began to know it had been a mistake to worry them into letting me out of the hospital,

[1] Lieut. Walter (Dixon) Scott, a critic and journalist of high talent, died of dysentery in the Dardanelles, Oct. 23, 1915.

or convalescent place, so as to come out with the rest. I had not guessed how much the burns had crocked me up. We had a couple of days in camp, in a sea of mud, and then entrained to Thiennes—24 hours in cattle trucks, not at all uncomfortable, as there were not too many of us to lie down. Here we could first hear the guns.

He tells how, on a further march, many men 'fainted or fell out', beaten by their loads, and had to find their own way; how, this being thought to be a lapse, and bad form, they were next day ordered a 'punishment march'; which 'the officers contrived to cut down a bit, but for me it was a finisher'. It is not known when the following lines were made or how far they are purely dramatic; they may have been prompted by memories of this painful marching:

God, do not give me any ease
  Of body from the pain
Of this galled shoulder and of these
  Flayed feet and burning brain,

But only that there come some gleam
  Now of what all may see
When what we hear to-day shall seem
  A speck in history:

Some inkling of the art to trace
  In our poor battered age
A quaintness, and a fragrant grace
  From it to disengage,

And overleap the little bars
  That baulk our prescience and
See, like the everlasting stars,
  In all we vainly planned,

In all our passionate distress
The trouble of a boy
Who, baffled by his littleness,
Has failed to carve a toy.

Soon he found himself in hospital, at Versailles and elsewhere; was made 'Provost-Sergeant to 33rd Division Infantry Base Depôt'; and at Christmas, to his dismay, was marked 'P.B.' (permanent base) by the doctors. But one of them was sympathetic; and Montague waited, thinking that the Board might relent, and not losing heart.

To Francis Dodd

Dec. 30, 1915

We crocked sergeants had a great Christmas feast in our little mess here. As I speak bad French, and most of the British army speaks none at all, I had to do the Xmas shopping, or the talking part of it, for both our mess and the officers', and I bought two turkeys, two fowls, and a goose at the most inordinate prices ever known. . . .

It is lovely to see our big guns, hidden like larks' nests on the open face of the country, banging away at the Germans, and their aeroplanes constantly trying to come over and spy them out, but always headed back by our anti-aircraft guns and scooting back surrounded with little silver balls of smoke—they hold together almost without expanding, long after the shell has burst. At night, too, the firing line is as scrummy as Bellevue with the rockets going on. Every few minutes the whole sky glows out with a sort of outward pressure of swelling light, when a star shell bursts; and then the illumination pauses a moment, at its climax, and contracts inwards again. Golumptious. The one thing of which no descrip-

tion given in England has given any true measure is the universal, ubiquitous muckiness of the whole front. One could hardly have imagined anybody as muddy as everybody is. The rats are pretty well unimaginable too, and, wherever you are, if you have any grub about you that they like, they eat straight through your clothes or haversack to get at it as soon as you are asleep. I had some crumbs of army biscuit in a little calico bag in a greatcoat pocket, and when I awoke they had eaten a big hole through the coat from outside and pulled the bag half through it, as if they thought the bag would be useful to carry away the stuff in. But they don't actually try to eat live humans.

Another letter shows the Provost-Sergeant, or what he calls 'the head bobby', on duty:

To his Wife

Jan. 29, 1916

I was sure you would be touched by what that poor old rabbit of a 'drunk' said. I fear I must have a natural affinity to criminals, for I always get on pleasantly with my prisoners, though I don't think I ever relax any rule for them. When three others were going away to quod the other day for a month, one of them said, 'At any rate we'll all have only pleasant recollections of you, Provost'. It's merely that I say the necessary things to them civilly and see that their meals are brought properly. You see how shamelessly I tell you any nice things that are said to me.

To his Wife

Jan. 10, 1916

Some soldiers are wonderfully simple in telling you all about their love affairs, in the most comic way. One

man in my tent tells me every day about his relations with his fiancée, her occasional failures to write to him and his own occasional intention of telling her that if she does not write oftener he will seek a wife in France. One time he will say that there isn't a girl in the world as he would swop her for. Another day he says, working himself up to a state of indignant indifference, 'Of course it's immateeral to me whether it goes on or whether it don't'. Another man wants to show me passages in his fiancée's letters which he thinks to be just cause of offence, together with his own magnificent repartees. I gather that a great part of the love-letter-writing of some people consists of superficial quarrelling. What a lot the Censor must know about it, and how it would help him if he were a novelist.

One novelist, at any rate, was hiving his observations; and the little scene, so naturally related, in which his suspense was relieved, is worth preserving. He appeared again before the Medical Board.

To his Wife

Jan. 28, 1916

I went in and found the Colonel-Surgeon, who barred me a month ago on the ground of my age, again presiding. He looked up at me genially, when I came to the table, and said, 'So I hear you want to have another whack at the Germans'. I admitted that I did. 'How old are you—I mean, your real age?' 'Forty-nine, Sir', said I, 'but only just'. He laughed a little, considered for a few moments, then looked up again and said, 'That's a life-saving medal ribbon you wear, isn't it—Royal Humane Society?' I admitted this too. 'Sure you're fit?' I said yes. Another doctor at the table said something about my having been there before. 'Yes, yes', said the Colonel,

'I remember him perfectly. Well, Sergeant, all right', and he marked me a big A on the report. I grinned and saluted and made off. He called after me as I was making for the door, 'Sergeant, I believe you'll do better up there than some of the young uns'. I thanked him and went, joyfully. I had been a little uneasy beforehand because he had met me by chance as he was going into the hut and said, 'Well, Sergeant, what are you doing now?' Of course I had said, 'Provost-Sergeanting, Sir'; and I was afraid he might say it was a useful job and I had better be kept at it. But our doctor's letter did the business. . . . It's fine that I am off the shelf now and shall see my friends again before long.

v

This was at Étaples; and he was further warned kindly, unofficially, and of course in vain, that he might go to the line, but that he had better not go, and that he was not young enough for the hardships of the trenches. So it proved, and he was to have only three weeks of them. But the experience was thorough while it lasted, and he would not have missed it for the world. The lot of the common soldier bit still deeper into his mind. In June 1917 he was to hear that two officers and some eighty men were left of the battalion with which he had come out in November 1915. He learned the idiom of the trenches, and in a story like 'The First Blood Sweep' it comes out. The contrast between the life and temper of the private, and those of High Quarters, inspires much of *Disenchantment*, the book in which Montague really freed his mind. Further, he was all eyes and ears, and his graphic powers were now greatly increased. A year later, in a comment on Mr.

Muirhead Bone's drawings, he was to describe 'Trench Scenery':

Those are the cramped and contorted parts of the front. A few miles away it will straighten and loose itself out; you see it run free, in great, easy curves, up the slopes of wide moorlands, the two front lines drawn apart almost 300 yards. Each is a double band of colour; the white ribbon of its dug chalk and the broader rust-brown ribbon of its tangled wire stand out clear against the shabby velveteen grey of the heath. Here there is less of thrill and more of ease in trench life; by day the sentries peer, hour by hour, into the baffling mist that is woven across their sight by our own and the enemy's wire; it is like trying to see through low and leafless, but thick, undergrowth. By night the wire makes, to the sentry's eye, a middle stratum of opaque dark grey, between the full blackness of the earth below it and the more penetrable obscurity of the night air above. But the darkness is never trusted for long. All night each army is sending up rocket-like lights to burst and hang like arc lamps in the air over the firing trench of the other. From a commanding point you can see, at any moment of any night, scores of these ascending rockets, each like a line drawn on the dark with a pencil of flame, arching over to intersect each other near the zenith of their flight, incessantly tracing and re-tracing the lines of a Gothic nave over all No Man's Land, from the Alps to the sea. All night, too, there is a kind of pulse of light in the sky, along the whole front, from the flash of guns. From the trenches the flash itself can seldom be seen, but the sky winks and winks from moment to moment with the spread and contraction of a trembling radiance like summer lightning.

At the end of February, Montague was in the firing trench near Bully Grenay, between Béthune and Lens;

and he notes the usual routine—'to advance support trench'—'back to reserve trenches'—'up to firing trench again'. But on March 21 comes trench fever; and within a few days he is in hospital again, at Rouen now, soon to be ordered home. He thus sums up his experience of the line:

To F. C. Montague

April 1, 1916

I am a beast not to have written before, but we were in the firing trench almost all the time from when I got your letter of Feb. 23 till ten days ago, and I have been in hospital, and rather knocked out, almost ever since then. I am not wounded—have never been touched by anything but a bit of falling shrapnel, which did not go in. I think perhaps my hottest place was in a crater which we had got hold of and were holding against the Germans in trenches 20 yards away. As platoon sergeant I had to patrol our little holding in the crater 20 or 30 times a day, to post and visit our sentries; and there was one point on my beat at which an enemy sniper used to take either one or two pots at my head almost every time I passed. Sometimes the bullet would go in front of my face, sometimes behind my head, sometimes just over, but he always missed; and it was a deep mystery to me and my platoon officer—on whom he tried it too; for, as far as we could make out, there was solid earth more than head-high between the place and everywhere in the German lines. I believe the German sniper must use in such cases some combination of a very tall periscope with an apparatus for aiming and firing his rifle from the height of the periscope's top. The beggar succeeded in shooting one of my sentries through the head, and we lost several other men and a fine officer in the

same way; but most of our casualties were from rifle-grenades, of which the Germans have a detestably good brand, though ours are not half bad either. Ordinary trench warfare, apart from actual attacks over the parapet, is not thrilling, but is always interesting and not really trying to healthy nerves. What people write about the sinister and malign and nerve-shattering sound of artillery is all rubbish. The water and mud are the real horrors of this war, and it would take some eloquence to do justice to them.

I'm afraid my days of the most active warfare are over. After we came out of the trenches I began to run a temperature and have some measly sort of bronchitis, and before I was sent to hospital I was told, with many kind remarks, that I could no longer be made an exception to the recent rule barring men over 44 from trench-work. I can't dispute the justice of it, for though I felt wholly young till I was burnt last autumn, I begin to feel an old crock, out of place among the boys,

> ex quo me divum pater atque hominum rex
> Fulminis afflavit ventis et contigit igni.[1]

A letter of rather earlier date may be added here:

To F. C. Montague

Feb. 9, 1916

I was grieved to hear last night that my oldest friend in my battalion was killed on Jan. 28. He was the only son[2] of Harold Herford, our professor of English

[1] 'Ever since the sire of gods and lord of men breathed on me the blast of his bolt and touched me with the flame.'

[2] Siegfried Wedgwood Herford, the 'S. W. H.' to whose memory, along with those of 'W. T. A.' (Arnold) and 'L. P. S.' (Scott), was to be dedicated *Fiery Particles* in 1923: 'unlike one another in everything but that they were not ruled by fear or desire and you could believe what they said'. 'Norse giant' must refer to sinews, not to height (6 ft.).

Literature at Manchester University. The son and I climbed together for years and he became in the end the finest rock-climber in England. When I enlisted he came back from France, where he had been driving a motor ambulance at the front, and enlisted with us too. I can't feel sorry that he did, even now, but it is bad that such a magnificent fellow should be one of our first to go down. He was a sort of Norse giant, hugely tall and strong, blond, with tranquil blue eyes in which one could not imagine any expression of fear or despair as possible.

VI

On April 12 Montague left Rouen in a small hospital ship, and after a rough crossing woke in Southampton Water, in the small hours; and went on to the South Devon and East Cornwall Hospital. Here he made the following lines, dated April 29, written apparently from a sick bed:

IN HOSPITAL

We from the sunless, airless trench,
The mud, the muddy bread, the stench
Of No Man's Land, where English, French
And Germans rest,

Came on an English April day
Through sun-filled railway-cuttings, gay
With English primroses, away
Into the West,

And found ourselves with Plymouth Sound
Beneath us, and Drake's bowling-ground
Above; and from the heights around
The bay there came

The boom of English guns, the call
Of English bugles. Best of all,
In this kind Devon hospital
  The old, the same

Strong gentleness of nursing eyes
And mothering hearts, and hands that bring
Health radiant as an English spring
To wounded, sick, and suffering.

To Oliver Elton

Fallowfield, *May* 8, 1916 [on leave]

I have had a great time since I enlisted. I became Grenadier-Sergeant in my battalion last summer, and was blown up in a bombing misadventure in October, but was all right after a month in hospital. This year we have been ending down southward from Béthune, always taking on some bit of trench that the French were holding before, and it was jolly to come across French soldiers so much and not to live wholly in a British enclave in Flanders. The scenery is beastly up in those parts, but everything else is pleasing, when the weather is fairly dry. I like the trench life, and it seemed to suit my non-rheumatic habit, so it was vexatious to get a little dose of trench fever early last month, when any little discomforts caused by the winter were over. . . .

I am glad they have made A. L. S[mith] the new Master of Balliol. He has a good touch in him of the wild man that people need to have in them in Oxford, to keep them from going bad.

After ten days' furlough spent at home he felt 'quite fit again', and wondered what would be his lot as a non-

combatant. He longed to go out again, and applied for a commission; but meantime had to pass a dreary month in Midlothian: at Leith Fort, in Olympia, Edinburgh, and at Granton. 'The whole atmosphere of bases and depôts is repulsive', he wrote, 'compared with that at the front.' Orderly sergeant one day, and 'commander of the guard' the next:

After coming off guard, sometimes march men not on guard to Leith municipal swimming bath. I see parts of Grand Fleet going out to Battle of Jutland and coming back. I arrest various reputable people for using field-glasses on breakwaters.

This was not inspiriting; and it was said that the men did not much like the Scotch, or the Scotch them.

To James Bone

Leith, *May* 13, 1916

It is jolly to be within reach of Edinburgh, and close to the sea. I find that this mainly Sassenach regiment is rather clearly conscious of being a sort of trespasser in a Scottish garrison, and it finds the living in ancient barracks a little plain after the fleshpots of billets in Leamington and Oxford. But I, as an Irishman, feel rather more as if I were in a land of acquaintances, or at any rate of intelligible persons, than I do among the Englishry.

But June brought hopes, and much of the month was spent in journeys to and from the War Office. There was sometimes mild comedy in Granton, to pass the time; we hear of

capacities for inertia in the great rumbling lumbering machine of army administration. To-day we had a

'Clothing Board' here: that is, three officers sit as a tribunal, and any man who had any of his clothes worn out or misfitting had to come before it and swear, on the New Testament, that his boots let in the rain or his socks were too small, etc. Most comic of all, I, who wanted nothing, had to swear that I was ordered to relinquish my dear old trench cap and receive a new cap of the old, hard kind. To-morrow we march to Leith and get the new things decreed to us as the fruit of these oaths.

He was soon to watch humours on a larger scale. He was 'fairly longing to get the Intelligence job' for which he had asked; and on being promised the appointment he rejoiced.

To his Wife

June 12, 1916

Please thank him [C. P. Scott] most kindly for his help in this rescue of me from the abominable life of a reserve battalion at home. I shall be right up among the guns again and I feel as if I had been given back my early youth. In a way I can feel almost grateful, now, for all past vicissitudes, because I shall have had such a wide experience, before the war ends, of the life of the New Army—in training, in trenches, at the base, at the depôt, in a surgical ward and in a medical one, as a private, an N.C.O. of three grades, and an officer; in the line and in the artillery, in the army at large and at headquarters. . . . I came out of the W.O. walking, as they say, on air, about three feet clear of the ground and full of profound pity for all sergeants who have not got themselves put on the G.H.Q. staff. When I get back to Granton I must insist on going on guard for the 24 hours from nine to-morrow morning, to deprecate Nemesis for my present exultation, and to make it up a bit to Morris and Wright for the extra work they have had in my absence.

To F. C. Montague

June 12, 1916

I must confess it will be with a little pang that I shall surrender my sergeant's stripes, but if I had remained an N.C.O., there was nothing before me but the formal humdrum of guarding a bit of coast or drilling conscripts till the end of the war; and it does seem as if, with the dearth of educated men in the Army, a man who has been educated and can speak French and has seen a bit of the war can be of more use on a job like my new one. So I am jolly happy.

For a moment Montague hoped that he might have leave to go for a month to the Russian front with some 'journalists and officers who were to act as "Eye-Witnesses" '; but this plan, perhaps luckily, fell through.

On June 20 he got his commission as second lieutenant, and stood by for orders. After a period of leave, spent in Fallowfield, he left for France on July 10 and reached G.H.Q. To this he was now to be attached as an Intelligence officer, beginning on the lowest rung, and, technically, as an 'Agent of the fourth class'. The new and wider scene was an ideal one for a good observer; and he now exchanged, as it were, the microscope for the field-glass.

CHAPTER V

INTELLIGENCE OFFICER

I

MONTAGUE was quartered, at first, for five months in Amiens; and a clear glimpse of him, soon after his arrival, is given by Lieut.-Colonel A. N. Lee, who was presently to supervise the Press section of Intelligence at G.H.Q. He had been talking with another Colonel in no cheerful mood,

discussing the poor quality and unsuitability of newcomers to France. He said, 'There—look at that old man going out now. What on earth use can he be with a 2nd Lieut. commission out here?' He too was hypercritical, as the result of frayed nerves. My reply, after inspection, was, 'He must be some good, he's wearing the Life-Saving medal ribbon'. 'Gosh, so he is', said the Colonel.

On taking over his duties, Colonel Lee learned whom they had seen, and what was his record; and, soon afterwards, had to censor one of Montague's articles, written 'for propaganda purposes'. There was nothing to alter; and Colonel Lee adds:

I registered a mental note that I would try to get his articles to censor as much as possible, because it gave all pleasure and no work in the doing.

These writings were of two kinds. Some were for consumption either in America or neutral countries, and were, of course, unsigned; they are barely referred to

in the diary. One article, a piece of 'camouflage' planted in a London paper for the benefit of the enemy, will be mentioned later. The other kind of propaganda was open and bore the writer's name; it will be described among his contributions to *The Western Front* and its 'continuations'; a kind of *libretto* to pictures of the scene by distinguished artists. Another superior officer in the section thought it well that for such work Montague should imbibe, as Colonel Lee puts it, 'the front line atmosphere, where he could get ideas and local colour'. He did imbibe it; and this mission fitted well into the queer calling that was to occupy him during the next eleven months.

He was, in the first place, to conduct 'distinguished visitors', guests of the army, over the Western front, within what were supposed to be the limits of safety. The list of those whom he thus escorted is like Homer's catalogue of the ships; it would be aimless to recite it here. Montague led round (besides Britons and Irishmen) Canadians, Australians, Americans, Frenchmen, Italians, Spaniards, Roumanians, Brazilians, Norwegians, and Japanese. There were officers, naval and military, attachés, Ministers, diplomats, M.P.'s of all parties and brands, Miners' Federation delegates and owners of newspapers. Many writers and artists came too. In Montague's diary are jotted down the names of Bernard Shaw, J. M. Barrie, H. G. Wells,[1] John Masefield, Spenser Wilkinson, Louis Raemakers, Muirhead

[1] See H. G. Wells, *War and the Future*, 1917, pp. 130-31: '. . . the firing-line, to which he always returns when he can get a visitor to take with him as an excuse. He now stood up, fairly high and clear, explaining casually that the Germans were no longer firing, and showed me the points of interest.' . . . 'He is a journalist let loose.'

Bone, and Francis Dodd. The last two were 'official artists', with commissioned rank. Also there are glimpses of M. Clemenceau and of Mr. Lloyd George. Most of these were rapid birds of passage. But there was also the band of war correspondents, who remained on the front, and who were already Montague's constant companions on his sallies. It was not till the next year that he became one of their official censors. Other journalists arrived, merely on tour; and among them was Lord Northcliffe, whom Montague found 'an easy companion', but for whose public policy and doings he has never a good word. In the diaries, amid long memoranda of dates and routes, there are outbreaks, sudden steam-whistlings and comminations, against those who in his opinion mismanaged the war or misguided the Press. These passages are only the rough material for *Disenchantment*, and need not be produced. On all such matters, while on service, he apparently spoke not a word; and refused, in the name of discipline, to comment on military business. It was often noticed how rigidly he held his tongue and kept his countenance. 'Never ran anybody down', says one witness; 'rarely, while I knew him', says Colonel Lee, 'expressed any really strong opinions on any subject'. Once a superior officer, who was not aware of Montague's writings or repute, was 'ticking off' an article from his pen on grounds of style, and reading it out in various mocking tones to show that it made no sense. Montague, we hear,

> never turned a hair, accepted the criticism, raised no argument, promised to re-write the article, and, having duly saluted, went quietly out of the room. I watched

him go, but he never showed a sign. To all outward appearance he was the most wooden thing in the universe. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have just glanced at me as they went out; he didn't, and I never want to see a better exhibition of self-control. Some time afterwards I mentioned the incident to Montague, but he only smiled and would make no comment.

He did break out in company at least once, in defence of the Irish people, whom some of the company were abusing. The narratives naturally differ in detail. According to one present,[1] he

never entered into a dispute, except once, when one of us insulted Ireland. Then indeed his blue eyes glared a deeper blue, and he seemed to tear the wretched victim to pieces and spread him on the floor. Next minute he turned to me with a quiet apology, 'You see', he said, 'I've suffered this a long time'.

Montague in his diary says that he 'testified mildly'. But this incident was exceptional; and, to quote Colonel Lee again,

I have never known a man of note, with a right to be such, who was so reticent. Nor have I ever met any person who said so little and 'looked' so little, but from whom one could learn so much. One learned almost as much, when with him, by reason of what he did not say, look, or do, as if he had given vent to all his feelings.

II

Mr. Muirhead Bone has drawn the following picture; it may surely hang beside his best:

[1] H. W. Nevinson, *Last Changes, Last Chances*, 1928, p. 140.

Montague was a man so fully rounded off, so well knit, that war, with its exacting requirements of poise mental and physical, seemed exactly to suit him. He was balanced to a nicety for such a condition of things, or for any. It was no doubt a bitter disappointment for him that his accident took him out of the line so soon after attaining that goal of his; but when I met him in August 1916 in Amiens, he was obviously in deep content to be out in France again, and with duties that frequently took him up the line.

That irregular face of his, with its mild and candid light-blue eyes between the keen soldier-like cheek-bones, and the large mouth so curiously refined by the expression with which he held it, radiated good sense, good humour and kindness to all the odd mixture of persons which made up the Press Headquarters and their visitors. It was unreasonable and uncanny to see such a perfect combination of warrior and intellectual. He, so peculiarly articulate in writing, was, fortunately perhaps, rather reserved and even shy in the messes, and passed, I suppose, with strangers who knew nothing of his reputation, as simply an unassuming decent man, evidently good at his job. His deprecating way was misleading, and we, his friends, liked it to be like that, for it made him more *our* property. He was at least our pride. Montague was a natural king among men, but no one was ever more unconscious of his power. His light touches carried a curious authority. One can't help speculating now on what he might have been with heavier responsibilities—M. as a commander! But then we should have missed *Disenchantment*.

Anyway, the amazing thing which no one would have dared to predict of a man so acute intellectually as Montague—that he would be so completely unaware of his natural eminence over his fellows—made his friendship a prize to be cherished, something to boast of. To

each of his friends his real character seemed a discovery of their own. Yet he had his quiet way with people he disliked, and kept them at arm's length in a manner exasperatingly impossible to break through. He would serve them to the best of his ability, but allow them closer he would not. Delighting as he did in everything which had a genuine savour and character, I think the mean and the malevolent did not appear to him to be quite real people, somehow. He scared them away from him, when they realised, perhaps, that his system of proportion did not seem to allow them enough room in the world. Maybe, his fictions suffered in comprehensiveness by this, but it made him the more adorable.

With Montague, one was always waiting for his peers to come along; and, his particular combination of qualities being so uncommon, his peers never seemed to materialise. So one felt him, against his will, an essentially lonely man, walking circumspectly and with admirable address across a dangerous country not quite his own—while containing very much to his liking.

Yet who could equal his zest, those days on the Somme, when his duty—a duty too good to be true—took him along the front as a spectator? He was an incomparable spectator, watching everything with a keen exaltation of all his senses. Sympathetic visitors must sometimes have suspected that their conductor would have been a still happier man if they had tactfully faded out of existence and left him to his uninterrupted observation. For no one could be confident that he hit off Montague's mood in these expeditions—his natural self-effacement and exquisite manners making this nearly impossible. Certainly he never failed in his duty to his charges—he was too scrupulous, he had too much of the responsibility of the elder brother, for anything of that kind. Yet every sensitive person, guided along the front by Montague, must have divined that the

guide was cutting down his objectives ruthlessly to suit their smaller capacities; and the generous-minded suffered accordingly. I remember his revived hopes when told off to show H. G. Wells round. This time, he felt, he would be sure to have a good push along the line, for such a guest could not but want to see everything. Anyway, I remember Wells returning up to the eyes in mud, and, I think, missing his boat. It was Philip Gibbs, I think, who dubbed him the 'Tiger'; he thought Montague's quiet manner decidedly misleading.

The first time I went out with Montague was in August 1916. His other charge that day was a Russian Colonel—a stout, and surely a little man—who all the time was plainly not satisfied that he was being 'shown everything' as promised. After visiting an advanced dressing station on the cellars of the Château of Contalmaison (the château itself had gone) we went back to a slope of the down behind and sat down to eat our lunch. Below us was the battle, and despite the mesmerism of Montague's calm elation at the scene, my sandwiches and my teeth didn't seem to keep proper time together. The day was brilliantly hot, and close to us some soldiers had taken the fancy to bathe in the rusty pools, and my dazed head was full of the impression that their naked figures made an odd sort of foreground to a modern battle.

That it was all the vividest kind of pleasure to Montague to be there was very evident. History had invited him to witness one of her surgical operations, and he was proud of the privilege, and not the man to lose anything of what was going on. Indeed Montague's whole attitude to life often reminded one of a kind but consummate surgeon. To us of the weaker knees it seemed to breathe the very words, 'Keep calm, and it won't hurt you'. He had the complete detachment of a

man whose courage of mind and heart liberated him from all anxieties.

I mentioned Montague's conscientiousness as a guide, and a quaint instance of it comes to my mind. It was in the late days of that autumn, when persistent fog and rain had slowed down the battle on the Somme to a standstill. This time, it was only round a dripping Amiens we went. He insisted on our doing the sights of the town most thoroughly, and to my mystification made me stand in the rain while he reeled off at each a careful historical description, which somehow did not sound like C. E. M.'s. Only on the way home to our mess did he explain that it was all got up by heart out of Baedeker, and that he had simply wanted to try if he was word-perfect. His idea seemed to be that G.H.Q. visitors should be shown *something*, even if fog and rain made it inadvisable to visit the front. Wasn't Amiens officially styled 'Advanced G.H.Q.'? It would save the poor devils from sheer boredom, anyway!

I shall always remember that sodden autumn and the hours we snatched for walks on the bleak fields round Amiens. How he cheered my homesickness as we walked through a landscape so grey in earth and sky that the colour of the chicory in the stubble stands out in my memory as some startling bloom. He loved to get to a quiet spot where his favourite pipe would not disgrace his officer's uniform. Often our walks ended in suburban streets, where we would come to attention rigidly at a French soldier's funeral. How perfect Montague was at such a moment! His salute as a brother-at-arms was a joy—he had the artist's passion for getting the thing just right. I suppose we must have looked a singular pair of elderly second lieutenants.

I often wish very much I had heard more of how he impressed other people out there. He was a familiar figure at Haig's Headquarters as the chosen conductor

of illustrious visitors, and I once heard Haig allude to him as 'our white-haired lieutenant'; he was amused and interested that the Radical paper's anti-militarist should have joined up at once. Montague wrote the notes to accompany the serial publication of my *Western Front*. In anticipation, he had prepared a draft of the preface for the first number, for the C.-in-C. to sign, in case Haig should have no time to write the introduction he kindly promised.[1]

In the same connexion, it was quaintly funny to see perhaps the best journalist in England standing stiffly to attention as second lieutenant, and humbly and in silence taking orders about the publication from our Colonel. To my reproaches for being so absurd, when clearly the Colonel was yearning for his advice, Montague warmly defended himself as doing the right thing; characteristically, he refused to be half anything. Certainly it is impossible to think of him laying himself open to anybody's rebuke. Official perfection was his aim.

To my mind the whole man brings up nothing but the happiest thoughts. He was the rarest kind of man, and he attained the uncommon kind of success he valued. His life had a perfect demeanour to existence, like a Greek's—only full of Christian compassionateness. He took the tasks of peace and war in his stride with equal ease, expressed himself with perfect felicity in everything he wrote and did, and then, undiminished and unweakened, left us to our happy memories of him as man and artist. True, we had too little of C. E. M., but had we not more than we deserved? Let us be grateful. His was true completion. Fortunately, it is not easy to lose his ghostly company.

[1] Sir Douglas Haig's own 'Foreword', however, was written, and precedes No. I.

III

Entries from the diary and letters home supply, between them, a picture of the five months at Amiens.

To his Wife

July 21, 1916

I have the busiest, oddest time. In the afternoon I may be on a recent battlefield, with the flies still completing the work of clearing away the remains, and the same evening at a French country house of the late 16th century in an idyllic pastoral place, with not a sound at night. You can't conceive the completeness of the destruction made by our latest artillery arrangements, and I never heard in the trenches anything like the cannonading that goes on now even on a relatively quiet day. All the better—it is the only way to the end.

To his Wife

July 29, 1916

One of these days the battalion [his old one] will have to take its turn in one of the advances here and then I know what to look for—half the officers killed, perhaps, and half the sergeants and a third of the men. It feels almost like treachery to be away from them when the time comes. I have been wondering whether, if they go in and get cut up badly, there would be any chance of success if I were to apply for a transfer to the battalion. There might be a time of hurried reconstruction, during which they might not disdain a ready-made subaltern who is also an old sergeant of their own.

To his Wife

Aug. 1, 1916

It is an odd, varied life to be doing this [writing for print] one day and on another visiting, perhaps, a wood where the dead are littering all the ground under the trees, or where, a few days later, only a few heads and feet and odd *disjecta membra*, too incomplete to call for prompt burial, are going bad in the sun. It's curious how one's standard of horribleness changes with circumstances. I have never seen anything out here, either in the trenches or on the great battlefield, that has seemed to me so distressing as the civilian that I saw some months ago in Fallowfield who had been run over by a motor car and had his skull fractured. It seemed such an outrage that *he* should be all messed with blood and mud, whereas dead and mangled soldiers seem to have a kind of naturalness, like people in a hospital.

To his Wife

Sept. 10, 1916

I have been out all day visiting cemeteries and isolated graves along half our front, and the only thing I can remember vividly is something I saw at one of them, where both French and English soldiers are buried. There was a Frenchwoman in deep mourning who had come with some white flowers to put on the grave of, I should think, her son. While she was arranging them on the grave there came into the cemetery one of the usual little processions—an English sergeant leading, then the chaplain, then a dead soldier on a stretcher, sewed up in a blanket, with a Union Jack over him, and half a dozen privates walking behind. They passed close by the woman, and when they were just past her

she gathered up half her flowers and fell in behind them. When they came to the grave and the chaplain began to read the burial service, she knelt down on the ground near them and stayed like that, praying, till the service was over, and then came forward, evidently overcoming her shyness with an effort, and dropped the flowers on the man in the grave, and then went away, weeping. I think I have hardly ever seen anything so touching.

Diary

Sept. 15.—To point between Maricourt and Hardécourt (close by Nameless Copse) to see battle begin. Start 5 A.M., moonlight. Cavalry on silent road by Querriers. Lances bristling against dawn—twilight sky in fields beside road.

Sept. 17.—To outskirts of Martinpuich. Many of our dead on ridge. More Germans in sunken lane under trees. Millions of flies black on them. Blackened faces. Open eyes staring up at sky as if asking whether there is any god anywhere.

Sept. 18.—At night to Château d'Argoules, the car rushing into tunnel of light bored into darkness by its headlights. Sleep at château.

Sept. 22.—Bombs dropped on Amiens from German aircraft about 3 A.M. I sleep through it, having had a long day in the air.

To Englebelmer O.P.—[Sees guns fired.] The 8-inchers struck ear more than the 15-in. The discharge of the 15-in. exactly like my bombing explosion—the splash of flame occupying your whole sight, the push of a hot wind, and the world-filling sound and vibration of everything. Showers of bits of cardboard fly back after the discharge. Eat our sandwiches in car and then go on.

Sept. 25.—Enemy aeroplanes busy over Amiens during dinner, and some bombs audible and many anti-aircraft guns. Hotel darkened early in consequence. . . . Archies [anti-aircraft missiles] sounding like falling blocks of wood on a wooden floor.

To his Wife

Sept. 25, 1916

As I am almost the only one of our party who has had experience of front trenches, I have the good fortune to get most of the work of escorting the more active visitors, who want to get well up to the centre of things, so that my little journeys are nearly always interesting. I do believe I shall be one of the best-equipped guides to the battlefield in existence after the war, and could make quite a decent subsistence by taking millionaire Americans round it for the rest of our lives.

To his Wife

Sept. 26, 1916

I picked up my two charges [visitors] and motored them over to an approach to an interesting part of the front. When near it we met, riding along the road, a general to whom I had brought the two sailors the day before, and he asked me whom I had brought this time, and then asked us all to come to tea in his dug-out and have a walk round with him afterwards. This went off very well, as there was just enough shelling to give our guests thrills and finally decide them to come back, without really endangering them. They got another little thrill afterwards, as the Boche, in his wayward way, suddenly took to shelling the road about half a mile in front of the car—not thickly, but just here and there. As he might be going to send them in faster, and there was no other way home, and the road would be

impassable if two shell-holes were made in it abreast of each other, I decided to go on without waiting for the chance of his stopping; and you should have seen the way the excitable American chauffeur took the car over the *mauvais pas*, talking loudly all the time, and sending us flying up from the seats wherever the bumpy road was particularly bumpy. Nothing fell near us, but the guileless civilians imagined they had been in a real hot place, and were talking about having been in the gates of hell, etc., for a long time after. What fetched them most was a place in the road where a shell had just made a hole that was about 15 feet deep. One feels ashamed to be going about with visitors who excite themselves if for two minutes in one day of their lives they run the quite small risk which every man in the trenches is running—and thinking nothing of—all the time. It is as if you and I were to escort the high-heeled tourist across the Mer de Glace.

Diary

Oct. 1.—To point near Courcelette sugar refinery ruins. Shelled there for some time with shrapnel and H.E., bits of shell and earth scattered over the party. Back to artillery lines, where we wait during attack in front. Begins at 3.15 with usual preliminary bombardment. Set out homeward at 4.30 across shelled area; none comes very close, but my flock nervous and apt to scatter. Home by dark roads, arriving Amiens 8.15 P.M.

Oct. 5.—[At a Casualty Clearing Station.] Shown round by C.O. and chief surgeon. See roomful of badly wounded having their gashes dressed under anaesthetics. . . . 'Resurrection room', where cases, impossible to operate upon when received, are seen to by Sister and others, and wonderfully rendered capable of opera-

tion in a few days. H—— has done 19 big abdominal operations in a day at times of pressure. Have had 125 operations done in a day. Thence to Boulogne to catch 4.10 boat. Then wait for 6.10 arriving boat to meet Japanese general [etc.]. . . . The Japs all bespangled and twinkling with orders and medals, very beautiful.

To his Wife

Oct. 6, 1916

I feel a kind of grudge against the mere sightseer who comes out to see the war as a sort of show, accompanied by all sorts of luxury and petting. It seems they were rather scared at the place I had brought them to on Sunday, where the shells were falling about, and I have been rebuked, not very gravely, for imperilling the army's guests—not very gravely, because I think we all feel in our hearts that the sightseer's only chance of saving his soul alive is that he should get a taste, if only for a few minutes, of the kind of thing that our soldiers are bearing all day.

Diary

Oct. 11.—To the Windmill (the ruins of its base) above Pozières, on the crest of the ridge. Shelled there, a signalling officer and his sergeant having drawn German crumps, from above Thiépval, by walking upright in the open. One shell falls within six yards of us, as we sit in a shell-hole, and showers earth over us. A half-brick thrown up by it hits L—— on the back in its fall.

Oct. 13.—About eleven at night I see part of top floor of Hôtel du Rhin burning gaily heavenward. Going across, I find rooms over old wing burning, and burning wood beginning to fall on the stairs. French firemen have a hose up the stairs and are working well;

but staircase is threatened. I go up and go through all bedrooms on first and second floors, but find everyone has bolted except a Colonial officer with a game leg, whom I drive forth in his pyjamas, boots and overcoat. Fire is put out soon afterwards. I go back to the mess and tell them. . . . A Commodore of the R.N., visiting at the mess, jumps up, says, 'I must go and see that my chauffeur is all right'.

Oct. 19.—With Masefield to Longueval. Walk about Delville Wood. Most of the bodies cleared up, but the wood haggard and sinister.

To his Wife

Oct. 12, 1916

[Two visitors] both eloquent in the French manner, full of antithetical points and epigrams like F——, and when they near the climax of a piece of eloquence, while walking about, they have to stop and stand still to do it justice with gesture, etc., as if they mounted a tribune. It happened so often at one place that I feared they would lose their train, and I improvised the dodge of saying in such cases, 'Pardon, mais ici on est vu par les Boches,' or, 'Ici il ne faut pas s'exposer,' or 'On marche un peu vite ici,' so as to prod them on; but a true French man of letters would rather be shelled than spoil a really good period when once he has got it going. They are funnily frank in their way of valuating everything that they or anyone else says, as a composition. One of them, after being shown a lot of different big guns by a colonel gunner, asked him, 'Et, mon Colonel, laquelle de ces pièces estimez-vous le plus?' In my function of turning indiscreet questions, I said, 'Mais un père aime *tous* ses enfants'; whereupon, to my horror, he grasped my hand and said, 'C'est spirituel, ça. Je vous remercie.'

Fancy that! as Tesman says in *Hedda Gabler*. Imagine me trying to say smart things in French.

To his Wife

Oct. 19, 1916

I always have several graduated degrees of exposure to which to treat guests according to what seem to be their desires or the needs of their souls for chastening, but of course I don't let them show up in any place where they would individually be a mark for the enemy. I only let them see the conditions under which all the combatants are, the whole time, between the firing-trench and the artillery lines.

Diary

Oct. 29.—To Mont St.-Eloi and Arras. Home in dark. All the front winking with flashes of cannon, and Verey lights making arches of fire between the front trenches. Low storming clouds monkeying about elvishly on the earth at near horizon.

Nov. 5.—With —— to Delville Wood. Leave car with Harris (chauffeur) at entrance to Longueval, with orders to turn, go back a little, and wait for us. Turning looks likely to be a long job, when we leave. When we have walked about 250 yards a German heavy shell comes over our heads and pitches, as far as I can judge, where we left the car. On reaching the place, find hole in road, just there, and six men dead, with faces unrecognisable through blood—one of them without a head, another half-naked. Look anxiously at faces, but cannot identify Harris, nor see bits of our car. Go down the road and find Harris stolidly standing by the car 300 yards further on. Says the shell burst within twenty yards of him. It burst just under a waggon and limber

with a lot of men on it. Ten or twelve wounded, besides six dead. Horses, unhurt, gallop down the road. The dead looked bad lying in the deep mud of the road, with the blood wet all over their faces and draining into the mud.

To F. C. Montague

G.H.Q., B.E.F., *Nov.* 7, 1916

How are you all this time? I hope the noctivagous enemy has not been dropping things on the Woodstock Road in an attempt to hit Crewe or Winchester. I try to imagine Oxford with more cadets in it than undergraduates, but it is very difficult. I am hoping for a long week's leave in the end of this month or the beginning of December, but we can never be quite sure of leave until it has come—or rather, till it has gone, as one may always be recalled in the middle of it. I am very fit, and see much more of the war than I did with my battalion. While living in trenches you see almost nothing, whereas now I see all parts of the front and plenty of the fighting; and after the war I can make my living by conducting American tourists over the great battlefield, if the excellent character given me in my formal discharge last June cannot procure me a good billet as a commissionaire.

Diary

Nov. 10.—Amiens bombed again in evening. Watched. . . . Lively night and great spectacle. Track planes crossing and recrossing city by puffs of Archie shrapnel; and see some bombs falling like rocket-sticks with some light still on them (are these duds?). Other bombs invisible, only detected by their explosion and the burst of flame or sparks. Nine killed, twenty wounded.

Nov. 11.—See house extraordinarily completely demolished last night by bomb, also trees uprooted on boulevard.

To recount all the excursions[1] with 'distinguished visitors' would require a map of the Western Front. The extracts have shown how Montague darted about almost every day with his 'flock' to some point near the line, and in what spirit he shepherded them out of, or into, warm places. There were trips to the coast; and soon he knew the country from Calais to Albert, and from Étaples to Combles; above all, of course, the Somme and Ancre valleys on our side, with their spines and dips and plateaux that defined the successive tactical positions. His passion, which is that of the good and wise, for maps and 'topographical portraiture' had been quickened by Arnold and trained in the Alps; it was to be expressed also, long afterwards, in *The Right Place*. His descriptive skill now increased; his notation, in *The Western Front*, for colours, sounds, and outlines is nicer than ever. As to his rank, he was gazetted a 'temporary' full lieutenant on November 21, 1916, and 'temporary' captain on February 16, 1917. Also he found himself an agent of the 'third' and no longer of the 'fourth', class in Intelligence. A diplomat once gave him the following letter of introduction: 'The bringer of this letter is not what he pretends to be; he looks like a soldier, but is really an intelligent man'. He was, in fact, both, though active service was denied to him. His life as a 'conductor' of guests continued during the first half of 1917; but he now changed his quarters.

[1] This experience is mirrored in *Rough Justice*, ch. xxi.

IV

On December 9, 1916, he went with his party to Rollencourt, which was to be his main resort, with many short absences and one long interlude, until the Allied advance in 1918. In Mr. Bone's *Western Front* there is a pleasing drawing of this little place, with low stumpy church spire, a few houses, graceful trees which look like birches, and the plain beyond. Rollencourt is near Hesdin, a small town on the railway between Montreuil and St. Pol, and lies due west, a little north, of Arras, about an hour's car ride from the nearest point of observation on the front. Its position is thus described in the diary:

We are just under the low wall of hill dividing the river system of N.W. France from that of Flanders. Going by car to Pernes or Fruges or Arras we cross the watershed within an hour's drive. On the Ternoise, an upper stream of the Canche, my old Étaples friend. It goes on to St. Pol and faces the Scarpe, an upper stream of the Scheldt, between St. Pol and Arras.

Rollencourt may be called Montague's home in France during most of the war. It will be seen how he liked to go back there for some peace and silence, and now and then to play. There was swimming in summer, football or badminton in winter, when work allowed; and one of his companions, Sir Herbert Russell, writes that 'he was very keen on all sorts of sport, and his great delight during the heavy winters we had was to get an old tea-tray, climb the hillside at Rollencourt, and toboggan down the snow'. At first he was billeted, not

in comfort, with the village notary, and messed at the Château de Rollencourt, where the journalists were installed—

a fine house, with park that must be beautiful at other seasons. The correspondents there in state bedrooms with a pre-Revolution air. Ternoise a clear stream running through park.

Later on a 'Nissen hut' was made at the château and shared between Colonel Lee and Montague. They were elected honorary members of the Press bureau, and all made speeches at the Christmas dinner. Montague had much writing work, unspecified, to do for the authorities, and observes, *Multum incola fuit anima mea.*

A full and distinct picture of his life at Rollencourt is drawn by his friend Mr. H. M. Tomlinson, the war correspondent:

C. E. Montague was at the Château of Rollencourt when I spent there my last period at G.H.Q.—the winter and part of the spring of 1916–17. I knew him, but had never met him till then. Nothing much passed between us at first. I judged that nobody ever rushed into his arms—he would not resent it, but he would be awkward and embarrassed. Now and then he said something to me, and I got the impression that he had a romantic and Elizabethan outlook on the affair which was keeping us both in that house. He would have liked to die for England—though he allowed you that idea of his dedication without emphasis. It was merely a matter of fact. As to the outward show of warmth in the man, his set and weather-beaten face took on a lilac hue in cold weather; and that winter was bitterly cold. He was a silent member of the house, stiff and brisk about his

THE CHATEAU DE ROLLENCOURT, 1916
From a drawing by Muirhead Bone

duties, friendly but distant. His reticence I knew was mainly shyness, to say nothing of the difficulty of being free and natural in an atmosphere which was charged with the possibilities of an idiotic Alice in Wonderland.

The writer then describes how Montague made no sign of dissent, whatever might be said around him, and whatever orders might be given:

He did not complain. He wore the uniform. He saluted his superiors and obeyed them with a rigidity of expression which never relaxed. He wore his hair-shirt, so to speak, as though he found it comfortable. Sometimes I used to think he thought that hair-shirts, if sufficiently rasping, the only wear for a man, distressing to his back but good for his soul.[1] There the war was, he did not begin it, he could not stop it, and there the 'great minds' were who were assisting in its direction; if he must wear a hair-shirt, nobody should know he suffered. I was certainly aware that he was a little disenchanted, but the full extent of his disenchantment surprised me when he published it.

After dinner in that house, most of us would sit by a log fire—it was a very cold house—to discuss, often in bitter jocularity, our fate and the world's. We were not enjoying life then; not more than one of us, perhaps. But we knew of infinitely worse conditions—there was a job close to hand, but not ours, compared with which penal servitude would have been a rose bower. But we could not help the men condemned to it; we could not help ourselves; and therefore the fun at that fireside was occasionally outrageous, as is usual with people who see it is folly to cherish hope. Montague, however, was wont to sit in a corner remote from that fire, as upright

[1] I venture to doubt some of the hair-shirt theory; he probably thought the repression very bad for his soul.

in an uncomfortable chair as a sergeant of the Guards, reading for his mental health the least congenial journal from the stand. No unbending! If he could not have the trenches, then at least he would sit in an uncomfortable chair. I glanced over to him now and then when he must have heard a word on politics or a subject near to him which made him want to shoot to some purpose, but he went on reading. How he suffered it without a shot surprised me. To ridicule the current popular notions, and the orders of the mediocrities promoted to importance by war, was the only relief allowed us; why, I have heard colonels of battalions with famous honours carry on in that château to relieve their minds in a way so seditious that it would have sent some stout fellows from Carmelite Street to complain to the authorities. It must have cheered poor Montague to have heard those rare outbursts from men entitled to make them—the real stuff at last—but even then he looked straight before him. He seemed to have heard nothing. But one night, past midnight, the pair of us were the last out of bed, and with his elbow on the mantelpiece he relaxed a little. He admitted his grief. He was, I suppose, moved by a sense of the loss of years, of the waste of good men and good time. He felt the futility of what kept him in that château. I had warned him—he had given me an opening—that some of us expected him to record what he knew of the secrets of the prison-house. He did not dissent. He confessed that he wanted to do one good book before he died.

He did do the book, though without giving away official secrets. The same friend describes one of the excursions to the front, and how Montague noticeably brightened up on approaching the danger zone. His daring, or rashness, will often be mentioned hereafter;

it became a sort of legend. Mr. Bernard Shaw, it will be seen presently, has said the right thing about it. To see his courage exaggerated would only shock Montague's shade. His temper was that of a good professional soldier—there were thousands like him—with an extra dash of pluck and a certain passion for taking risks. They were not a tenth of those run by the soldiers who had to take them all the time. He was barred from fighting, and was happy in snatching them when he could. No doubt he need not always have done so; he seems to have done so less as time went on. But he was not one of the wild fellows in his own tales, who wish to be shot. The professional soldier learns to be no such fool as to put his head out purely for wantonness. In *Right Off the Map* Montague condemns the suicidal gallantry which is not war. There is no record of a casualty among all the persons whom he 'conducted'. If this was partly luck, it also meant skill and caution. But people marvelled that he was so venturous in spite of being civilian-bred, older than the rest, white-headed, and a literary gentleman.

V

For six months the entries continue much as before. On January 23 he has to take an important despatch to Sir Douglas Haig:

I find the C.-in-C. knows about my various conducting expeditions, and is very friendly. Says, 'I hear you're a terrible fellow at going along the trenches'.

About this time there is an explosion, in the diary, of 'disenchantment':

Oh, the way that everyone is used for what he is least fit to do, the way that department wars against department instead of the Germans, the way that sheer direct action towards winning the war is instinctively disliked and feared by the old War Office type of formalist.

If we were a band of brothers for one month, I believe we should have won the war. If we could all forget decorations and promotions for six months, it would be over too. If we, outside the trenches, bore what men in the trenches do, it would be over too. If all these miracles happened together, it would be over at once.

Ferreting about for themselves in this soft cheese-like world of fecklessness and self-seeking and public spiritlessness are the sturdy maggots like ——, intimidating all the little timid professional soldiers and corrupting the discipline of the army. Can we win still, in spite of it all, or is it to be the end of freedom and joy for us all?

This was not a chronic mood; a quieter one is heard in the next entry that need be quoted; those in the interval are little more than a log of journeys and interviews:

Diary

CHÂTEAU DE ROLLENCOURT, 10.15 P.M.,
March 19, 1917

A year ago to-day I marched away from the front with my battalion, soon to leave it.

To-night I sit in an oil-lamp-lit room in a château, of 1770 perhaps. A log fire burns brightly in a big, open, fenderless hearth, with little noises of hissing and crackling in the damp wood and the dry.

Outside an equinoctial gale is pressing on the house and whining and sniffing.

From the line E. of Arras-Nesle comes news at short intervals of further German retirements, of villages

blazing in the Eastern sky at night, of cavalry entering empty villages, of aeroplanes bringing back word of the cavalry's progress.

The big room is dark outside the zones of fire-light and lamp-light.

Five minutes ago the motor-cyclist despatch-rider came from G.H.Q. with our letters and to-day's London papers. In a few minutes he will go into the night silence again, with my letter to M. and the other letters.

Now and then a train can be heard on the railway to Arras, 300 yards off, doubled this winter for our advance, which the German retreat must be intended to baffle.

Diary

March 27

By car, with Lance-Corporal Bonafoux, to . . . Boiry Becquerelle, our last village eastwards here. No trench, soldier, or line visible from here, but Hénin-sur-Cojeul, in German hands, visible a mile away to the N.E. One of our snipers busy a few hundred yards to the N. We walk E.S.E. through a washed garden of yews, box-edging, and fruit-trees, and beyond, in a corner of an orchard behind a hedge, I am challenged by a corporal in command of a sentry group of two men. I ask him where is our front line. He says, 'Well, Sir, I'm our most advanced post here. We had one up the road on the right, but it was scuppered the other night.' I see the 'road on the right', a sunk road, sloping obliquely up a little rise towards Croisilles, an enemy strong point less than two miles away. It looks sunny and peaceful and tempts me to reconnoitre it and see the lost post, if empty of Germans. Bonafoux and I go up the road, and in 300 yards come to two little shelters under the east bank of the sunken road. The captured men's messing tins and waterproof sheets are lying about and the hay in the shelters is still moulded like a bird's nest with the

pressure of their bodies where those off duty rested. Fifty yards beyond the derelict post the explanation of its capture is made clear. A German communication trench, coming from the direction of Croisilles, debouches on the road, out of its north-eastern rising bank. Clearly the enemy, at night, streamed down this trench, overpowered the little post and carried them off prisoners. On right of road, near Boisieux-au-Mont, a German military cemetery, an extension of a French village cemetery. Near the entrance-gate a well-kept grave, with ivy and some sort of primulous flowers planted on it, and inscribed

Hier ruht in Gott
der englische Soldat
C. M. Cross
9 King's L—pool Regt
gef. an 7.4.16.

Other well-kept and planted graves of English and French soldiers beside the road further on.

To F. C. Montague

April 17, 1917

How long it is since I have written to you! I think it is partly because there is no Sunday here to awaken old instincts of regular writing-letter. Behold me again in the midst of our long-drawn battles—meet incidents of our long-drawn war. I saw the beginning of this one, before daylight on the morning of the 9th, from a little height above our front, from which I could see all our guns flash off together at the second of starting, like a beaded line of electric lights all turned on from one switch, and then each of them turned on and off and on again as fast as possible by a switch of its own. At intervals beyond this line of flashes there were the big

geysers of flame, and dark objects visible in the middle of it, spouting up from our mines under the German front trench; and then at every two or three hundred yards there went up signal rockets from the German trenches, that seemed like visible shrieks to their artillery and supports to protect them from our infantry, who, they knew, were then on their way across from our trenches. I could see all this going on along several miles of front, and it was strangely dramatic, though all expressed through lights in the darkness alone, until the day broke and we could see our infantry already beyond the second line of enemy trenches and sauntering across quietly to the third, with our barrage of smoke walking steadily in front of them like the pillar of smoke in the desert—only of course it cannot give complete safety; and now and then the line would have a gap made in it by a shell and would join up again across the gap, and go strolling, with the strange look of leisureliness that an infantry charge of the scientific kind has now, until the time comes to rush the last few yards and jump down into the enemy's trench. It is grievous to to think that my battalion has twice had this great moment since I left it last midsummer, and that I may never know any more thrilling contact with the enemy than mutual sniping and a little reconnoitring of ground between his trenches and ours. The only compensation, so far as it goes, is that I see much more of the war and of the front as a whole, and the battlefield of the moment in particular, than one sees when engaged in honest regimental labour.

This was by Arras; and the colour effect is also noted in the diary:

Miles and miles of our front begin to dance in the dark, with twinkling and shimmering flashes. Suggests

a long keyboard on which notes of light are being swiftly played. Then, from points all along German front, signal red and white and green rockets go up. Also 'golden rains' of our liquid fire, and one or two mine volcanoes. Dawn breaks on this firework show. Then on to a huge earthwork, an outwork of Arras citadel, and lie on safe side and look over with field-glass. Our infantry visible advancing in successive waves to take the second German trench-line N.E. of Arras. Disquieted flocks of rooks. Then to Divl. H.Q., to find good news.

Diary

April 23

Much air fighting and Archie-firing. We see two of our aeroplanes brought down. I hear S——, as he looks through his glass beside me, say 'Jesus Christ Almighty', and I see that an aeroplane is reaching the ground in flames and smoke. At 7 P.M., as we are leaving, another is brought down in a straight nose-dive to the earth, near same place. One or two indecisive air duels, the two machines flying round and round the circumference of a circle, trying to get at each other's tails, till one finds that the other has the pace of it and does a fluttering tumble down through several hundred feet of air, recovers itself at a lower level, and scoots. A bad day for us; the enemy aggressive and confident. Losses on both sides heavy.

Diary

May

The business or office work of this army is done by many officers as a man might do his private business if he were insured against losing anything by giving way to impatience, jealousy, petulance, and slap-dash.

To his Wife

May 17, 1917

No letters yet to-day, and a dull, dead day, cold at first and now mild. I have just been for a little walk by myself and it seemed to me I could never have really noticed apple-blossom before, it is so extraordinarily lovely. There's a curious reaming look about it, like foaming cream or some sort of light puffy chiffon on a beautiful dress. I was feeling lonely and the beauty of it made me feel lonelier. There's something about beautiful days and beautiful places and things that seems to act on any sad feelings of one's own as a hollow dome acts on music—and makes it enormously more resonant, and makes it possess one more completely.

To his Wife

May 31, 1917

A man here has got *The Return of the Native*, and I borrowed it last night and read the first few pages again. How wonderful they are—I do believe the finest opening ever written for a novel of that kind. I shall try, at odd times, to read on. There is something massive and hill-like about Hardy which makes him good to read during this passing madness of the world—he helps one to feel what a mass of durable things in human nature as well as in other 'nature' are going on all right, all the time, and will be there to come back to when the evil time is overpast.

To his Wife

June 6, 1917

I have gone on with *The Return of the Native*, admiring it more than ever. . . . I had forgotten how directly

Hardy's pessimism is declared in the description of Clym Yeobright, where he says that mankind's enjoyment of life *must* decline, and the view of life as 'a thing to be put up with' prevail, and that we shall all cease to admire beauty of face as distinct from full expression of experiences mainly painful and disillusioning. What perversity it is. Life only seems to me to be more of a wonder and glory and ecstasy, the more I see of it, and I feel it specially when reading Hardy's own descriptions of beautiful-natured people like his faithful lovers, and of lovely places.

VI

In January 1917, Mr. Bernard Shaw, by invitation, spent a week at the front, and he has been good enough to set down his recollections of Montague. They are a just and striking tribute; and I am glad to be able to quote from them at length, before passing to Montague's own reflections upon war.

At the château where the Army entertained the rather mixed lot who, being nondescript, were classified as Distinguished Visitors, I met Montague. Finding him just the sort of man I like and get on with, I was glad to learn that he was to be my bear-leader on my excursions. Except on three occasions, when he was relieved, once by Tomlinson, once by Philip Gibbs, and once during my visit to Robert Loraine's flying camp, we spent all the time together.

The standing joke about Montague was his craze for being under fire, and his tendency to lead the distinguished visitors, who did not necessarily share this taste (rare at the front), into warm corners. Like most standing jokes it was inaccurate, but had something in

it. War is fascinating even to those who, like Montague, have no illusions about it, and are not imposed on by its boasting, its bugaboo, its desperate attempts to make up for the shortage of capable officers by sticking tabs and brass hats on duffers, its holocausts of common men for nothing, its pretences of strategy and tactics where there is only bewilderment and blundering, its vermin and dirt and butchery and terror and foul-mouthed boredom. None of these things were lost on a man so critical as Montague any more than they were lost on me. But neither of us ever asked the other 'And what the devil are *you* doing in this galley?' Both of us felt that, being there, we were wasting our time when we were not within range of the guns. We had come to the theatre to see the play, not to enjoy the intervals between the acts like fashionable people at the opera.

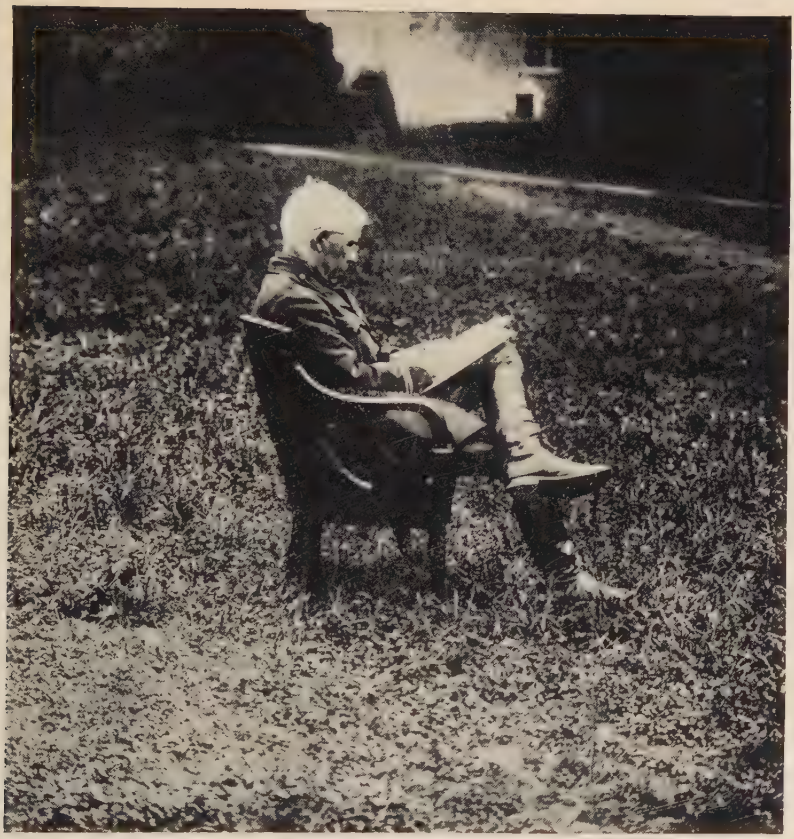
We had, nevertheless, no great excitements. On the Somme battlefield, which was the favourite military show at that moment, I found the British Army blazing away industriously at imaginary Germans. We asked why the Germans did not fire back, and were told that they were expected to do so at Albert at three o'clock. But Albert, with its plunging Virgin, suffered no further scathe that day. The truth was that the Germans had folded their tents and silently stolen away to their new Hindenburg line. The guns that were banging away my taxes so strepitously were only making holes in the ground and not filling them up again. As we walked up towards the windmill at Pozières a solitary German shell exploded harmlessly half a mile ahead of us. Montague stopped dead, and surveyed a Roumanian general who was with us, wearing a gorgeous uniform. 'I ought not to take you up to the windmill', said Montague; 'you are not in khaki. They may see you and have a shot at you. And I am responsible for you.' General

Giorgescu grinned: 'Let me point out, gentlemen', he said, contemplating our careful khaki with amused contempt, 'that as the whole country is frozen white, you are much more likely to be conspicuous than I'. This was obviously true. . . . Montague shrugged his shoulders; and we went on. The Germans must, I think, have left behind them one of the patent scarecrows advertised in Stores catalogues, which fire a shot automatically every fifteen minutes; for they did send over one more aimless shell, which impressed the general sufficiently to make him insist on a young friend of his who was also present retiring behind a knocked-out tank. And this was all the satisfaction Montague got that day out of the battle of the Somme. Ypres, where the smell of powder was distinctly stronger, was better from this point of view.

Montague was a typical daredevil; that is, a quiet, modest-looking, rather shy elderly man with nothing of the soldier about him except his uniform. He would have been a hopeless failure on the stage as Captain Matamore. He had something of the Tolstoyan bitterness and disillusion that war produces at close quarters, less by its horrors, perhaps, than by its wastes and futilities. But to this he gave no intentional expression: his conversation and manner were entirely kindly. He said nothing of the exploits for which he was mentioned in despatches. . . .

By that time Montague was a captain, and, being a man of conspicuous civil capacity without military ambitions, was needed to run the show much more than to stop projectiles in the firing line. Hence, I presume, his efforts to get back into it occasionally as escort to distinguished sightseers and joy-riders.

As Montague stuck to the provinces after the war I never saw him again. I liked him so well that I once or twice wrote to him to see how we could renew con-



C. E. MONTAGUE, 1917

tact; but it somehow never came off. His books about the war showed that we had understood each other pretty well on points never mentioned between us. His worst trial must have been listening to me repeating my hackneyed conversational stunts at different mess-tables every day with an air of brilliant improvisation. In the car going back I used to apologise; and he always said (God forgive him!) with touching kindliness, 'I assure you it is always fresh and delightful'. That is the sort of man he was.

VII

The following passages, which are not in sequence of date and partly anticipate the next chapter, give Montague's more private thoughts on war, and show how he sought to meet his own scruples and those of others. They are all connected; but the first four face the question whether war can be reconciled with the teaching of Christ,[1] while the last four deal, I think very efficiently, with certain pacifists of the extreme Left. The verses are dated Dec. 31, 1916; the rest was all written in the course of 1917.

Yes, of course it was sin
  And no Christ would say 'Fight
  For the right'—
But we *had* to win.

When the chaplain would bluster and blow
  About laying the rod
  Of God
On the back of 'His foe',

[1] For more on this see *Appendix*, pp. 312-3, *post*; also *Right Off the Map* (1927), pp. 27, 57.

I knew it was all just a form,
  And there was no fiery sword,
  And the Lord
Was not in the storm.

Yet—to have stood aside
  Hoarding my fortunate life
  With my wife
While the other men died!

Some sort of god, good or bad,
  Would have kept me longing in vain
  To be slain
As I am, if I had.

To his Wife

June 16, 1917

I look on the struggle as one between believers in the virtue of war and disbelievers in [it], and feel almost proud and glad that we are, in a way, amateurs at it as compared with the Prussian professionals, just as I would rejoice to see a professional garotter choked by some inoffensive person who thought garotting beastly. I do find it a little perplexing that one can't cast out Satan except with his own instruments, and yet the result of our not casting him out would be so unspeakable that I can't hesitate. But, all the more because of the moral puzzle, I feel very keen on our keeping to the cleanest methods we can and avoiding any of the special Prussian beastlinesses of bombing non-combatants, harsh treatment of prisoners, etc.

Diary

End of 1917

To take part in war cannot, I think, be squared with Christianity.[1] So far the Quakers are right. But I am more sure of my duty of trying to win this war than I am that Christ was right in every part of all that he said, though no one has ever said so much that was right as he did. Therefore I will try, as far as my part goes, to win the war, not pretending meanwhile that I am obeying Christ, and after the war I will try harder than I did before to obey him in all the things in which I am sure that he was right. Meanwhile may God give me credit for not seeking to be deceived, and pardon me if I mistake.

Diary

April 5, 1917 (*eve of Good Friday*)

[Despite bad signs] Still, we may win. The multitude of men who think of nothing but serving hard and faithfully unto death, who do not hope for distinctions or promotions, may carry the world into safety and a new life. Hundreds and thousands of them will die, after this Good Friday, more painfully than on a Cross. Our hope is that in them, as in Christ, a worse world may die into a better, and larger life come out of death, and mankind be ennobled by losing its noblest men—the old mystery of the Cross and of evolution.

I seem to have lost my chance of thus following Christ. There seems to be no hope of getting back to

[1] See, for similar reflections, the conversation of the Garths, father and son, in *Rough Justice*, ch. xvi. (1926).

my battalion. Because I am 50 I must live among the *embusqués* and not with the friends I love and honour since I came to know the depth of their courage and patience in the trenches. It is cheap even to murmur against it. It is like trying to combine my ignominious safety with a little easy aspiration after self-sacrifice. But I do mean it.

Cavalry moving up all the roads. Procession of Red Cross trains up St. Pol–Arras line. Push put off from 8th to 9th.

[*Undated*]

They died that life might greater be,
  That children not yet come to birth
With a more single eye might see
  Our high adventure on the earth,

That in a far-off summer's night
  A boy's awakening soul may scan
With still more passionate delight
  The nobleness of being man.

But did they know or will it? Do
  The myriad roses that have died
To make more beautiful the time
  Of roses next midsummer-tide?

All life goes dying into life. . . .

To his Wife

Jan. 9, 1917

—— seems to be in that most unhelpful state of mind —mere distress at the horribleness of war in the concrete—as if we didn't all feel that just as bitterly and as if we were not kept going only by feeling sure that something still more horrible, and durable too, would

come if Germanism, as we now know it, were to win. I hate war more, after seeing it, than ever I did, but it would seem to me the most dreadful baseness if we were now to yield to the frightfully strong longing that one has for mere cessation, on any terms, of the killing and being killed. Of course the fighting of any war is, in a sense, a dreadful act, but the one impossible, unpardonable act would be to fight it till half the blood it entails has been shed and then to abandon it, irrespective of the attaining of its objects, merely because it was dreadful. So I am a little out of sympathy with ——, though I do long for peace indescribably and shall certainly try harder after this war than I ever did before to dissuade people from making war lightly and from thinking it a noble or beautiful thing in itself.

To his Wife

Nov. 26, 1917

[On a book received] I can't somehow find satisfaction just now in intensely felt exhortations on strict Christian lines, because Christ's opposition to all war seems to me almost indisputable, and yet I *can't* apply it to this war. I don't feel that Christ was ever wrong, and yet I do feel that to fail in resisting our enemy in this war would be wrong—that it must be either the enemy's victory or ours, and that if it were his, the 'Kingdom of Christ on the earth' would be more remote than it will be if we win. No doubt, if all the nations engaged in the war would simultaneously agree that war was un-Christian, and make peace on a Christian basis, it would be all right, but if our side alone did it, it would simply mean that the other side would walk over it and that the negation of Christianity would score enormously as a rule of national life. . . . [The papers]

read to me, out here, as if they did not really take the war seriously, they seem so eager to waste our national strength in keeping up quarrels at home and raising new ones. If only they could rise to the same sort of comradeship that people of all sorts practise in face of a bad accident or other emergency!—of course with perfect liberty to begin biffing one another again as soon as the trouble is over.

To his Wife

Nov. 3, 1916

I do sympathise with you most keenly against that view of —— and her friends. I have just that inclination you speak of to think that a minority is not at all unlikely to be right, but it can't always be the minority that's right, and I feel quite sure that nothing could be done to shorten the war or save lives all round by suddenly telling the Germans that we don't want to smash them. Of course we want to smash their power to bring on another misery like this war. And anything else but defeat would leave them still convinced—I mean their governing people—that war is a proper thing to resort to, at favourable times, as a means of national promotion. The horrible thing is that in their two previous wars, each deliberately sought and provoked by them like this one, war did pay them; and if they succeeded, or even did not fail badly, in this war, it would be the most terrible fortification of their theory that war is a kind of normal national business, like trade and art and scientific invention, and not merely a last means of self-protection. I think the trouble with people like Miss —— is partly that they cannot imagine how different a German politician's state of mind is from their own humane and war-hating one,

and partly that they are somehow just a little wanting in one of the three circles of natural affection, like this—

I mean that the central dot being, say, ——, she has the first, or inmost circle, *i.e.* family affection, all right, and also the third or outermost circle, *i.e.* affection for humanity; but the middle circle, *i.e.* affection for the family, or company, of friends and comrades composed of one's own nation, is somehow fainter than the others, like the dotted line; and people who are at all short of this affection often cannot believe that for other people to feel it passionately is anything more than a mistake or a prejudice or a disability of soul, although they are sometimes people who most vehemently prefer their own children to other people's and would back their own relations through thick and thin against members of other families.

From 'The Western Front,' 1917

To have had a part in this war will deepen in most men the feeling that war is a thing first to be avoided by every honourable means and then to be won by every honourable means. Of avoiding this war there is no question now. All that ended in 1914. Since then the only opposition has been between fighting with more resolution or with less, with more national comradeship or with less, with more or with less of moral and physical force behind every blow that we strike. . . . Our cause

is the same just cause that it was. Those to whose help we then came need our help as urgently now. We see even more clearly than then that, if our enemy won, there would be no life worth living left in Western Europe for men and women reared in a free country. . . .

Some sincere people do not grasp the emergency nature of war; above all, of this war. They are distressed to see the whole foreground of life taken up with the apparatus of war, with war thoughts and war measures. They feel as if civilization were passing away, and the good things of peace going down past hope, in a world taken up with their opposites. If they could only know what soldiers feel!—the intensity of their faith that this war is not the whole of life but only a passing accident of it, a thing like tempest or fire, demanding, so long as it lasts, the most tense concentration of action in certain simple forms and the faithful joint practice of certain simple virtues. To them, at any rate, peace when it honourably comes will be a call as stirring as they found the call to arms. They will help to re-make the old world as eagerly as they have helped to save and clean it. *But one thing at a time.* They were waked from sleep to put out a fire and, till it is out, they only ask to get on with the work, and they make magnificently light of its hardness. You see them do this in Mr. Bone's drawings. . . .

Some of these passages were written late in 1917; and meantime, on June 6, Montague notes 'a change', for which he had reason to be thankful.

CHAPTER VI

PRESS CENSORSHIP

I

HE was now to hold a position of some authority. It did not console him for being barred from the trenches, but it was better than showman-work however variegated. He became an 'assistant press officer', or assistant censor, dealing with the despatches of the English and American correspondents on the Western Front. The earlier plight and final recognition of this guild are described in *Disenchantment*,[1] and also in Sir Philip Gibbs's book, *Adventures in Journalism*. By now the system had been reorganised; and Montague's chronicle will be the clearer for a note on the machinery in which he formed a link.

In June 1917 this section of Intelligence was divided, one branch looking after the British, Allied, and neutral press, and another after propaganda, 'visits', and other matters. The press branch had a fixed establishment of officers, who acted as 'conducting officers' and as censors; and to this Montague was attached. There had for some time been five authorised English correspondents,

[1] Ch. vii., where several passages are embodied from an initialled article in *M.G.*, April 28, 1921. The Chief of Intelligence, named in the article though not in the book, was Brigadier-General J. Charteris. The Allied Press was under the command of Major the Hon. Neville Lytton, O.B.E., who looked after the French correspondents; his opinion of Montague is given below, p. 212. In an unreprinted passage of his article Montague speaks warmly of Major Lytton's success in 'keeping the French and us together during the evil months of failure, carnage, and mortification in 1917'.

who, though often relieved, were the most constant representatives of the press at the front. These gentlemen, all of whom were to be knighted (K.B.E.) in 1920, were Mr. Philip Gibbs, Mr. Percival Phillips, Mr. Perry Robinson, Mr. Herbert Russell, and Mr. Beach Thomas. Each of them had a mission from one or more London newspapers, with the exception of Mr. Russell, who came for some important news agencies. All of them were Montague's very frequent companions. Also there were, somewhat later, two regular representatives, varying from time to time, of American papers.

Montague's superior was Captain C. R. Cadge, with whom he formed a cordial friendship. Captain Cadge, who was concerned with the English press, worked under the immediate command of various officers in succession. The first business of the censor was to go with the pressmen to the front or to their interviews with the Staff. They were often told in confidence by the military of the programme for the coming day; and they were supplied with full reports, morning and evening, of operations. These reports formed the basis of their despatches, and would be combined with what they had learned on their excursions. They would go out to the best place of vantage, and on their return pool, in conference, whatever material they had brought back. A censor would be present to say whether there was any detail that would not be passed; it was seldom necessary to do so. The correspondents would then retire, write their messages and send them piecemeal to the press office to be censored before transmission to the Press Bureau in London. Sometimes the censor, instead of simply blue-pencilling, would explain in person

C. E. MONTAGUE, WITH CAPTAIN C. R. CADGE, 1918

to the writer what needed to be changed. Captain Cadge writes that

the whole show was run on very genial and friendly lines; but of course occasionally, in the hectic days and nights of war, feelings got pent up and had to break out sometimes. The job was one which demanded continual tact, and keen observation of which way the wind was about to blow, in time enough to put up a screen if required.

Montague sometimes felt the edge of the wind. When his chief was away, in hospital or on leave, he was in charge. Some of those whose missives he then had to edit were his old companions; and there were others, less congenial or discreet. After some experience he wrote:

To his Wife

Sept. 23, 1918

Cadge is splendid at it, whereas I can never check or counter people lightly. I find that my rebuke of one of the colonial correspondents, before my leave, made a most painful impression, and that he regards me as an impossible dragon of brutal severity. And all the time, when I have to rag any of them, I am shivering with reluctance or secretly feeling a sneaking sympathy with the person whom I am 'telling off'. I could always manage all right the discipline of Tommies, but the discipline of one's equals in worldly station seems to me extraordinarily difficult. At the office before the war, it seemed almost like an illness when I had to tell off one of the staff severely.

It might seem that he was too sensitive for such a job; but he went firmly through with it. In his diary he

gives some pungent illustrations of the need for a censorship. In the nature of the case the reviser often had special information. A sentence written in all innocence might have to go out because it 'gave something away', or because, if quoted in the enemy press, it might cause undue elation. The military might think that too much, the correspondents that too little, was being passed. Now and then, when left in charge, Montague was thus embarrassed. In *Disenchantment* he speaks highly of the journalists, who were his habitual companions:

> Almost without an exception, they were good men. Only one or two black sheep of the trade would try to make a reader believe that they had seen things which they had not. The general level of personal and professional honour, of courage, public spirit, and serious enterprise, was high (p. 96).

In an article written after the war[1] he narrates the troubles of the censor: at first

> one officer after another had patently failed, each in a way of his own, to conduct the tuneful choir of British war correspondents. One commander would bully, another would try the loose rein. King Log or King Stork, no one succeeded, and he who made the venture had small repose between the seven devils of a correspondents' camp, fretful at having their excellent professional writing mauled by half-lettered laymen, and the deep sea of a G.H.Q. still nervously watchful. In the summer of 1917 the impossible job passed into the hands of Captain C. R. Cadge, a young officer disabled by ill-health following a head wound.

[1] *M.G.*, April 28, 1921 (initialled).

Then Montague speaks of the 'immense, patient common sense' and kindliness of Captain Cadge, of the regard in which he was held, and of his service in giving 'war correspondence its nearest approach to working liberty during the war'.

There was reason to be annoyed when a few of the chroniclers who came and went showed the gifts of the novelist. Now and then battles twenty miles away were reported by 'eye-witnesses'; or there might be a description, in colours like those of Joseph's coat, of events which still had to 'go through the hollow form of taking place'; or which, perhaps, failed to do so. Such loose practice, or rather bad faith, was of course the exception; and so, too, were the squalls in the community: 'occasional tiffs', writes Sir Herbert Russell, 'which always ended in laughter', or perhaps in 'ordering two vermouths'. They sometimes arose, as might be expected, over Montague's methods of censoring. He had a rigorous sense, natural and acquired, of discipline; and yet it afflicted him to be disciplinary, to be forced to 'tell anybody off'. He therefore did not relish his work; but he knew that it was necessary, and he did not despise it.[1] There were, naturally, diverse views of the way in which he did it. The leading correspondents themselves differ in their findings. One of them speaks of 'a trait of military formalism curiously out of harmony with his real character'; another says that Montague was 'liberal-minded' in his dealings with 'copy'. Some of them called him, amicably, 'Sergeant Ramrod'; one

[1] Sir Philip Gibbs, in his *Adventures in Journalism*, while paying a signal tribute to Montague, speaks of him as 'contemptuous of his work'; but the diaries show that this is a misapprehension.

of them states that he was 'always just and reasonable'. The biographer need only note these variations, and has no means of knowing what the world may have lost through Montague's excisions. Clearly he was determined to be well on the safe side; and I suspect that the last word on the matter rests with Captain Cadge, his chief:

> He was a glorious companion to have, whether at work or at play, at rest or in stress. Whatever he did, he did with so much keenness and zest—I never saw him bored or tired—and he was so entirely reliable. His censorship was, perhaps, over-careful; but I never found it wrong. Whatever he took out he had a definite and good reason for taking out, and he never risked leaving anything doubtful in without first referring to me. I think he must have often thought my censorship 'slap-dash'; and so, compared with his, it was. I might explain this better by remarking that through my legal training I had learned that *De minimis non curat lex*, and my temperament was such as to give this axiom full scope when censoring; but with C. E. M., with his stern sense of duty, there would be no *minima*.

With all this, it is plain that he won, and kept, not only the respect, but the warm liking, and often the true affection, of the leading war correspondents. I do not much like the look of stringing together testimonials; but shall do so at some length, because they come with force from seasoned gentlemen who do not throw about their praises, and who lived with Montague under conditions that tested everyone's nerve and temper. Also their record saves for us a number of scenes in his life that would else have been lost.

Sir Percival Phillips calls Montague

a wise and sympathetic adviser in many matters connected with our difficult task, and at all times ready to help us without regard to his own comfort. As a censor, he was always just and reasonable, yet he never leaned towards the correspondent's view merely because in peace-time he was himself a journalist. The fact that he was such a great journalist—and, more than that, the master of a faultless style—used to be uppermost in the minds of the correspondents, at least in mine, when I went into his work-room at the end of a strenuous day with my hastily-written, all too crude despatch. I felt almost apologetic that such an artist in English should have to read such makeshift phrases and hastily-pieced-together pictures of the day's events.

One of my most vivid memories of Montague is of a quiet dinner at our mess in France, on the night of his fiftieth birthday [Jan. 1, 1917]. He desired no speeches, and indeed would have prevented the fact from being mentioned, if he could. There was not even a toast in a formal way, but the affection all of us felt for him was summed up in the casual remark of a colleague, who merely raised his glass and said, 'Let us all be fifty!'

After the war we wrote to each other occasionally, and I followed with affectionate interest his brilliant literary work.

Montague has a permanent and a very prominent place in my memories of the Great War. I am proud to think that he included me among his friends.

One of the senior correspondents, Sir H. Perry Robinson, is somewhat critical of Montague's editorial work: 'Curiously enough, he was not a good censor, whereas with his experience and his beautiful literary sense he should have been':

But we all admired him, and, personally, I liked him very much indeed. (I was several years older than he, and perhaps he was less unbending with me than with some of the others.) Very gallant, undeviatingly conscientious, with a great scorn for anything like trickery or lack of candour, he must have won respect and honour in any company anywhere.

Sir Perry adds that Montague, latterly, 'seemed less anxious to get into unnecessary danger', but that he 'still remained an incomparable companion when going to unpleasant places'. For example:

Another day that stands out (I see by my diary that it was Sept. 22, 1917) was when we went—Beach Thomas also with us—up by Wieltje to see something of the Passchendaele fighting. My note says we were 'badly shelled'; and I remember that we had to run through the mud as best we could to shelter in a half-wrecked German pill-box. A day with Montague was always likely to be hectic.

II

For the fullest of these records, and not the least vivid, made by a war correspondent, the reader is indebted to Sir W. Beach Thomas, K.B.E.

Montague may well go down to history as one of the romantic figures of the war; and the romance—a word he would have hated—clung to him after he was saved from the life of a fighting soldier and became a captain in the Intelligence. He once said, meditatively and with quiet truth, that shell-fire gave him a mental stimulus that nothing else did. He also said, and he would not say a thing without meaning it, that he

thought it would be a fine thing to be killed in this war. There can be no doubt that he definitely liked shell-fire at one time, though his nerves were a little frayed towards the end, largely because he was responsible for other people's safety. One particular journey with him, illustrating this side of his character, will always abide in my mind's eye.

We went to see the colonel of a Labour battalion whose time was largely spent in repairing roads and duckboard paths, continually shelled to ribbons, on the Pilkhem ridge. The Colonel was one of those who so hated things, and the enemy, that he actually wished to be killed. His mind sank further and further into a slough of disgust as he worked day after day in the stinking mud of that continuous cemetery. He took us to the crown of the ridge: his Major, Montague, and me. As we reached the top he pointed towards a hidden and distant German battery, and said, 'If we stand here a minute they will begin to shell us'. To his obvious delight they did, and very accurately. The Major, whose nerves were on edge, wisely retired to a shell-hole; and I followed with what deliberation I could muster. The Colonel and Montague continued to stand talking on the ridge, stiff, obstinate silhouettes against a grey sky. The second shell fell short, half-way between us, and one great piece flew low, straight at the shell-hole, looking, as it seemed to me at the moment, absurdly like a low partridge flying at a gun crouched behind a low hedge. Montague did not stir. He was ideally happy, enjoying his mental stimulus; but, being very careful of other people, he induced the Colonel to retire slowly. Poor Colonel, he had to wait another month before the desired shell struck him.

Quite unintentionally, Montague always wore a nearly impenetrable mask. His punctiliousness in the observation of military etiquette, especially in demean-

our, and sometimes an almost deprecatory air, might have led a casual observer to think that he was a too deferential subaltern rather than a Happy Warrior. But happy warrior he was, through and through. I said once that the right way to get through the war was not to think, but to take the day's work, and even pleasure, as it came; for thought was a weakener. His view was more courageous. He could endure the beastliness for the sake of the nobility; and, underneath his almost excessive deference to his superiors in rank or position, he nursed a burning indignation against all whose spirits were not finely touched to the fine issue. In the corridors of Headquarters he came across some few whose thoughts were focussed on their own advancement; and he was so enraged by this sin in the soul that he afterwards (as it seems to me) did some harm by exaggerating the number and importance of such officers. The satire on their intrigues, expressed in his short stories, was so mordant that one can scarcely believe the target to be as small as it was.

He was a perfect companion in all respects, whether in journeys to the front or at restful interludes. With what vigour he rolled a rough tennis court we made, and with what zeal he played any game! He would play with you, walk or swim with you (he won the life-saving medal while at Oxford), or talk classics or go where shells were, always cheerful, always humble, and always, you felt, full of a high and quiet courage.

His duties when I knew him were those of censor as well as so-called 'conducting officer'; but he was not altogether a good censor, certainly not so good as others who had small share in his genius. The main reason lay, I think, in his extraordinary, even extravagant delight in the written word. Faults of manner and style hurt him so much that his attention was distracted a little from the duties proper to a censor. I heard complaints

that he had played the editor rather than the censor. He left things that ought to have come out, and altered things that were not the censor's concern. The complaints were probably justified, but they acknowledge the defects of a great virtue. He himself was incapable of writing imperfectly.

It was a treat to find in him some little likeable vanities. He was proud of not having taken his degree; and he was a little proud of not having read all sorts of books that one is supposed to have read. And he was not a great reader, though better critic seldom wrote. For myself, I never read any single piece of criticism, at any rate in a newspaper, that seemed to me so near perfection as a leader of Montague's in the *Manchester Guardian* when Meredith died.[1] What he read he knew with amazing thoroughness; and was fond of getting things by heart. He was letter-perfect, for example, in the whole of the Sixth Aeneid. Perhaps his style was too perfect. I know one popular writer whom it infuriated; but if anyone seeks a perfect adaptation of manner to matter he will find it in the brief and compact letterpress contributed by Montague during the war to the sketches of some of the war artists, especially those whose style was the most revolutionary. It is rare indeed that the man of action and the man of letters are so closely bound together. He disliked a man who used a false word and gave a false impression almost as much as the man who nursed a false ideal. His companionship was a liberal education, for he had the gift, in spite of his modesty, of making his ideals infectious. In his presence shells, if not too near, became almost enjoyable.

One other heartfelt and candid tribute is all the more welcome as coming from an American witness, Mr.

[1] Parts of this have been quoted above, pp. 62-3.

De Witt Mackenzie, who represented the Associated Press of America, and who is now the chief of its London Bureau. He was very often in Montague's company from August 1917 onwards.

Were it possible for me to live again the best parts of my life, I certainly should ask that there be included the wonderful hours I was privileged to spend with C. E. Montague along the Western Front. There would be many of these hours—and days and weeks and months, for that matter—but each would be a golden one. I have never thought of him in any other terms than as 'the great Montague'. In looking back it seems strange to me, almost paradoxical, that any man should be able to inspire both deep affection and reverence in everyone he met. Yet Montague did this. We loved him as a brother; we sat at his feet as humble disciples. He was a rare combination—a genius of broad understanding, with the heart of a naïve child who loves the whole world and knows no evil. I suspect that this is the answer to my paradox.

One finds difficulty in summing up Montague's complex characteristics. If one may be permitted to relate two or three incidents, they perhaps will show something of his traits better than could be done in any other way. Had our friend lived a few hundred years ago he most certainly would have been a great explorer and discoverer. The times and circumstances made him an outstanding scholar and writer, but in his heart he was an adventurer. Never have I known another man who so loved to thrust himself into danger for the sake of the thrill he got from it. He was known as a 'fire-eater' throughout the length of the British Front.

I shall remember to the end one trip I made with him into the zone of death during the never-to-be-forgotten Passchendaele push. The Germans had been

driven back along the Roulers railway, and Montague and I decided that we would look the battlefield over. For hours we pushed forward through the frightful mud, making our perilous way between the huge, water-filled shell-holes which in many places almost interlocked. The German 5·9's were coming down about us like peas off a hot skillet. Everywhere was death and destruction. There wasn't a moment when we were not in danger of being blown to atoms. Frankly, I didn't like it, but Montague gloried in it. I had troubles of my own, but I watched him in fascination. His shoulders were squared, his head was thrown back, and his eyes were blazing with a strange fire. He was in a state of ecstasy—a man in a trance. Montague in the flesh was marching beside me amidst those screaming shells, but I was certain that his spirit was soaring on the wings of adventure. The real Montague didn't come to earth until we encountered a crisis. We finally reached a ridge, just back of the British advanced line, and so exposed to the enemy that they were shooting at our troops from shrapnel guns with open sights. We paused for a moment, and then Montague tossed his head like a charger and said: 'Let's push on'.

We had barely resumed our journey when a piece of shrapnel hit my steel helmet. The metal rang like a church bell. For a bit I rocked about on my feet, wondering what had happened to me. Then I looked over at Montague. He was gazing at me with troubled eyes; he had come to earth again at last. 'I think perhaps we have come a bit too far, Mackenzie', he said in his quiet way. 'Let's get under cover.' He was thinking entirely of me. Shrapnel never worried him personally. However, we went over and sat down among the dead behind a concrete pill-box and rested. Then we started back home.

More miles of that awful mud! We were still some

distance from our car when I almost collapsed from fatigue. Montague was as fresh as at the outset. He glanced back to see how I was getting on, and saw my predicament. In a moment he was at my side. He slipped his arm through mine, with a chummy little laugh of encouragement, and all but carried me the rest of the way—this grey-haired soldier who was twenty years my senior.

The greatest compliment I ever had paid me was tendered by Captain Montague. It was this way:

I went into the censor's office one afternoon with a thousand-word despatch, representing my story of the day's fighting. I handed the message to Captain Montague, who inquired if I had been given a late bulletin from G.H.Q., which completely altered the complexion of earlier accounts. I had not; I had been overlooked. Moreover, I had my trench coat on, and my car was waiting to take me back to the front to get more news. I was in a hurry, and I regretfully admit that I gave a display of temper. I stormed—not at Montague, for the oversight was not his fault—but I stormed in general. Finally I announced that I would not rewrite my despatch, but would let it go as it was. Let the world suffer from the incorrect report. With that I flung myself from the place in high dudgeon.

When I returned to our headquarters that night, dear old Montague came to me and told me very diffidently that he had taken a great liberty in handling my story. He was sorry I had missed the late bulletin, and he had rewritten my despatch. He hoped it would be all right, and that I wouldn't mind. The author of *A Hind Let Loose* tendered me the message. A thousand words, retouched by a master writer whose name will always live in English literature! Montague watched anxiously while I struggled to read copy which I could scarcely see because of the moisture in my eyes. I've

forgotten what I told him, but somewhere I have that message tucked away among the things I cherish.

Several of us, including Montague, were seated at table one day. Fierce fighting was going on at the time, and everybody's nerves were on the ragged edge. Because of this there was a good deal of pessimism in the air. Somebody remarked:

'The whole world has gone crazy with the war lust.'

Nobody answered excepting Montague, who looked up with a whimsical smile and a questioning 'Yes?'

'Yes', affirmed the other. 'Mankind has sunk below the level of swine and is glorying as it wallows in the mire. Christianity is as dead as a door nail, and men are going out to slaughter one another for the pure joy of killing. There isn't a spark of mercy left in the human breast.'

'Apropos of nothing in particular', responded Montague, 'I saw an incident up at the front to-day that might interest you. While I was standing at an emergency dressing station a wounded Tommy came trudging in to receive attention. He was leading a German prisoner, who also was wounded—just a boy, of seventeen or so. I was interested in the queer pair and inquired about them. Tommy had been in a hot fight, and had already accounted for three or four of the enemy when he came upon the youngster. The boy was frightened, but he managed to shoot Tommy through an arm, and then prepared to use his bayonet as Tommy charged.

'Tommy undoubtedly was seeing red by this time, and was as near to the brute stage as he ever would get. He had been fighting hand-to-hand; he had killed, and now he was facing another who was trying to kill him. But instead of using his own rifle or bayonet, he closed on the German lad and disarmed him. Somebody asked Tommy why he hadn't killed the German.

' "You see, sir," apologized Tommy, "'e was such a little beggar I didn't 'ave the 'eart to do it." '

That was all; there was no further argument at the table; indeed, there was nothing more to argue about. It was Montague's way of handling a situation. And it revealed again the bigness of his heart and the breadth of his understanding.

III

He was thus to be occupied for more than eighteen months. Instead of squiring strangers round with many precautions, he could now see the war for himself. He had great and surprising luck, in spite of his ventures, and was never hit. Often a shell plopped down in the spot 'which we had just left'. He had no more illness to speak of. Along with his party, he chased the war, vibrating between Flanders and the Somme, planting and closing down one press office after another, or arranging for housekeeping and travel; and, up to the time of the Allied push in 1918, returning when he could to the quiet of Rollencourt. He heard that he would have been recommended for the M.C. but for a 'new order restricting it to men now fighting at the front'; and this, he remarks, is 'a just rule'.

His first journey in his new capacity was to Flanders, to the region of Ypres, and there, with many dartings to and fro, back to Rollencourt, up to St. Omer and Dunkirk, or down to Vimy, was to be his chief sojourn for the rest of the year. The party sped off to join the Second Army and see the battle of Messines, and were quartered at Cassel, where soon afterwards their bureau

was to be fixed for many months. The following is a typical day:

Diary *June 7, 1917*

Arriving at Cassel at 11 last night, I leave at midnight with P. Phillips, Gibbs, Sims, and Small to see the Messines Ridge battle from the Scherpenberg. Reach it about one. Watch the lazy lights and sullen sounds of the front for half an hour and then go to sleep under a hedge. Next thing I am aware of, through a film of sleep, is a light whimper of shrapnel bursting somewhere near. Just after, I am fully awaked by the rocking of the hill under me. I jump up, sagely thinking it must be an earthquake, and then see seven huge mines still exploding — geysers of flame with black objects in it, leaving huge palm-trees of smoke drifting away in file. Bombardment begins at same time (3.10 A.M.). Rather far off—more than three miles—it sounds like an extremely long, various piece played on a piano full of rather far-off thunder. Many great fires caused in woods, etc., by our drums of oil and phosphorus (I believe). The bombardment more intense than that of April 9 at Arras. As the light comes we see a great number of our aeroplanes everywhere, very little shelled. No infantry fighting visible.

Then they fly back to Bailleul and find the corps commander 'radiant at the success'; it is the famed and brilliant victory of Messines, gained in a day after months of preparation. They hear that the casualties are light; see prisoners in a 'cage'; and then return to Cassel, where the press messages are submitted. A fortnight later Montague receives a decoration, a 'little gaud': 'I am gazetted a Knight of the Order of the Crown of Roumania, with Swords!' having conducted

a General of that nation round the front some months before. He quotes Lord Melbourne's remark upon the Garter: 'No damned merit about it!' On July 3 he is at Cassel, during the visit of the King; dines in a hotel room 'reserved for our meals and those of the King's detectives'; follows, with his band, the royal progress; is presented to the King, who is 'full of good humour and goodwill' and also of merriment. The Prince of Wales is there too, 'blond, infantine, rather lassitudinous, with enigmatic light-coloured eyes'—a sketch in the manner of Mr. Carlyle. Next day, under orders, Montague writes a 'camouflage' article, which is to appear in a London paper, first edition, and then to be hurriedly suppressed, not without questioning in Parliament. His first draft, thought to be 'too pointed', is recast. The feint report would thus be spread of a 'great assault on Lille', to disguise the real assault, and the Germans would see it. They did see it, and afterwards Montague was told that they 'bit on it very hard', and he was praised accordingly.[1]

After a short leave, he was back again at Cassel for the 'third battle of Ypres' (July 31):

With Gibbs, after daylight, to see battle from Kemmel. Misty, and also smoky from gunfire. Not much to be seen. Rain coming on. *Le bon Dieu boche* has arranged the weather again,—*der alte Gott*, *der deutsche Gott*. Then to casualty clearing stations to see wounded. . . . In the afternoon I help in censoring the correspondents' articles.

This kind of entry, with the perpetual din of shells, recurs through the next months, into mid-November;

[1] See *Disenchantment*, pp. 104-5, where a similar tale is told.

there are allusions (often mere notes of battle-plans and places) to the first, second, third, up to the ninth 'Flanders push'.

There are memoranda of this kind:

Oct. 4—*Third Flanders push; battle of Broodseinde.* Up at five. Drizzling rain. No breakfast. Out with Gibbs to near Wieltje to see battle. Fine battle-piece on S. part of Passchendaele Ridge. Our guns thick—needs care to thread way between them. Germans dropping fair number of H.E. shells our way, but no gas. Great trains of wounded and prisoners coming in, and a track of bloodstains all along the road. Some of wounded have evidently died on the way.

Oct. 7.—We traverse N. to Zonnebeke station. Huge number of German dead—many dug-outs choked with them and many lying in open. Extraordinary difficulties in getting up guns for next [day]. It pours hard all day; shell-holes half full, streams choked and not draining surface. A major commanding an R.F.A. battery points out to me mournfully an expanse of mud and water near Zonnebeke, and says, 'That's what I'm supposed to have made into a battery position to-morrow morning'.

Oct. 29.—About 9 P.M. enemy bombs Cassel. One bomb drops in field behind my billet. Another wounds a woman in street and kills a donkey used by a wounded and discharged French soldier who hawks rabbits. We get up a subscription to get him a new donkey.

On November 6, 'from a point on the ridge S. of Boche Castle', Montague, Perry Robinson, and Philip Gibbs saw through the mist and drizzle a white flare that promised the capture of Passchendaele. Then 'on getting back to the cross-roads we find that since our

car left a crump has pitched on a working party there', and killed many of them. On November 19 Montague closed the Cassel office and hastened back to the Somme country to see the battle of Cambrai. The beginning of the great drive, on the next day, is again covered in mist, 'even when I climbed up a tall elm at Morchies to an O. pip'; but on the next, as it proceeds, the party pass over the ground won upon the day before. 'Silence and solitude in the Hindenburg line, where yesterday's fighting had been.' This was in Havrincourt wood: 'German equipment, rifles, cooking-stoves, letters lying about as they were left in panic; scarcely any corpses to be seen'. During the rest of the month they watched our advance, and the fierce fighting about Bourlon, and then the German counter-stroke and the British withdrawal to a new line. One more characteristic note may be given (December 1):

> [The shell] has made a hole blocking about two-thirds of the road and killed a man, who is lying in the dust of the road with his brains out and a perplexed, weary look on his face. Someone has closed his eyes. He looks dusty and humbled, like a worried rat, and the blood is spreading round his head in the dust. The traffic goes past him and the hole, in single line; the wheels a few inches off his head. No other shell follows.

Why do those who write of war, so seldom write like that?

Dec. 3.—From comments on Lansdowne's letter I gather it must be a Pacifist tract. On reading the letter I am surprised to find it a good declaration of war aims, likely to be approved by soldiers here, and useful towards victory. Our press seems to be in a queer state

—talking hysterically in fear of being thought unpatriotic if it does anything else. It looks like the temper of defeat, but the plain soldier may still pull us through.

The enemy had regained some of our hard-won territory; and on December 14 Montague anticipates the mood of *Disenchantment*. 'If the Germans used all their strength now, with all their generalship, on this front, even our men could not save our generals—the asses would go down with the lions they had tried to lead.' Still, on December 19, he writes: 'My leave is sanctioned for Dec. 29-Jan. 12. *Te Deum laudamus, te confitemur esse dominum*. I go about in a state of rapture.'

IV

Some of the letters written home during these months again discuss the questions of principle which exercised Montague in the midst of censoring reports and interviews with generals.

To his Wife

Sept. 5, 1917

I've noticed in a review of Muirhead Bone's show [*The Western Front*] by —— . . . a sort of assumption, as a matter of course, that everybody writing out here keeps back all sorts of untold horrors of physical suffering from people at home. I can't understand this a bit. Of course, just as in ordinary life one does not go out of the way to describe details of a friend's death by cancer or locomotor ataxy, so one does not keep harping on details of incised, contused, and lacerated wounds and of the special agonies one has seen in some few

cases. But why should one? One assumes that every adult knows for himself that death by bayonet or shell wounds cannot be a pleasant experience or sight, any more than the horrible deaths at home in bed are, or the deaths by mountain or river accidents. I can't help feeling that at the back of the minds of people like —— there is an unconscious craving that we should go out of our way to make the incurring of probable death, in a good cause, a more terrifying and repulsive thing than it is for a natural-minded person. Forgive this tirade.[1]

To his Wife

Oct. 3, 1917

Oh, I forgot to say, about the tragic side of war—'war as it is', etc.—that in all the horrors I've seen at one time or another there was nothing that did not fall within what I had always expected. To see carnage isn't a revelation at all—it's only a verification; and my previous detestation of war in general, and my idea of it as a thing to be always avoided by all honourable means, is exactly the feeling that I shall come away with at the end of this war.

To his Wife

Sept. 17, 1917

P—— came back from leave yesterday, and was rather gloomy about rumours he had picked up at home that people's patience at home was wearing thin and that there would be a big outcry for patching up a compromise peace this winter. One would be ashamed ever afterwards if the Germans stuck it out more steadfastly

[1] See, for more on this, his pages on 'War as it is', in *The Western Front*, vol. ii.

than we. It would seem as if there *could* be no great place left in the world for a people that had vowed so much and then broken down. A frightful lot of harm must have been done by the panic shrieking of the London newspapers about the enemy air raids. If anything could make the Germans more certain to go on with their raiding of England it would be these terrified squeals over a handful of casualties, as casualties go in this war. But I hope P—— is misinformed and that the prospect of America's help will keep the nervous ones steady.

You would laugh to see my embarrassments under the kindness of my old billet-lady and her servant. I told you how they daily place a splendid pear from the garden in my room. The other day I hadn't time to eat it during my one incursion to the billet during the day. So it became too *avancé*, as they say, and next morning a fresh one was brought in with my shaving-water. Being in a great hurry that morning, I went out without eating the new one then, and was met on the landing by the billet-lady, full of apologies for the first pear's advancement. Meanwhile the ancient *bonne* slipped into my room, and I heard a piercing cry from her of 'Il n'a pas mangé, Madame, il n'a pas mangé!' I have had to be very careful, ever since, to make time to eat my pears.

To his Wife

Sept. 18, 1917

I just long, too, to be writing again. I feel, conceitedly, that I could write so well now after all this change and new experience. I feel there are some futile tricks I used to have in writing that I should not fall into again, and also that I have got to understand better than before the mind of the sort of person who is non-literary and yet good to write for.

To his Wife

Nov. 5, 1917

Confound X's desolating activities. It's just that sort of wilful disheartener that I have tried to deprecate in my introduction to vol. ii. of *The Western Front*, so far as one may do it as a soldier, who must not enter into politics. It's wildly untrue for anyone to talk of France as 'delirious with suffering'. Of course she has suffered, but everywhere she seems to me to be almost a perfect model of cheerful stoicism under it. She is quite wonderfully self-controlled and undelirious, and in this respect I've often felt she sets a splendid example to some of our excitables at home who want to shriek out their own orders to the Air Services whenever there is a German raid on England. Considering what the French have had to stand, I think their self-discipline has been one of the most splendid things of the war, and it's a stupid libel on them to call them delirious.

To his Wife

Nov. 18, 1917

Z is manifestly a Pacifist and her book a propagandist one on that side, but all that she gives you is just a lot of clever and humane lamentation and censure —never a bit of suggestion as to how we should deal with the present disaster, or emergency. It rather exasperates me to picture her superior hero and heroine compassionately looking down, from their conscious heights of insight and goodness, on all the Philistinism and barbarism of people who are trying to pull them out of this mess. Of course they find it quite easy—I mean the superior hero and heroine—to spot all sorts of ugly things that are said and done by second-rate people

under the excitement of a war; but to use this as the basis of an impeachment of everybody who wants us to win this war seems rather like censuring the main purpose of a fire-brigade because individual firemen talk of bloody this and bloody that. The whole method of judging a cause by the actions and words of the worst type of person you can find among its supporters is too cheap —I believe I've done it sometimes in politics, but I vow I won't any more—it's tempting because it's so easy. All this Pacifist intellectualism seems miserable waste, because the people who go in for it are in some ways so excellent—in everything except in not having a sense of evidence—and could be so useful in keeping up civilised and chivalrous ideas among our people during the trying time. As it is, they only tend to give the more vulgar souls on our side a confirmed impression that civilisation is no good at a pinch.

To his Wife

Nov. 14, 1917

Of the spirit of hatred and revenge there is quite extraordinarily little among soldiers who do the actual fighting—much less than among some foolish journalists who try to relieve their feelings that way. It seems a regular instinct among our men to make almost a pet of a German, once he has surrendered; they seem to regard him rather like a lost dog. After the war I believe there will be less ill-will against Germans in general among our returning soldiers than among any other equal number of men at home, just because hard fighting, man against man, tends to let off bitterness and make you regard your opponent as a kind of other side in an athletic contest. In intervals in some of our recent battles there have been quite exemplary spectacles of honourable fighting—stretcher-bearers of both sides,

out in No Man's Land in crowds, sorting out their respective wounded, and nobody firing a shot at them.

V

There is another record in 1917 of Montague's experience. Six months before his appointment as censor he had begun once more to write. He was commissioned to supply words to the drawings that his friend Mr. Muirhead Bone was making, by authority, of the scene of war. *The Western Front* came out, sponsored by the War Office, in ten monthly parts, forming two volumes, and starting in December 1916. There is the general preface by Sir Douglas Haig; everything else is written by Montague, whose name appears on the title-pages of the volumes, though not in the single parts. He contributes a short introduction to each volume, another one to each part, and little notes to face each picture. It was a happy alliance; the places drawn by Bone were already burnt into Montague's mind: the whole map of the Somme, the shattered towers and churches, the waterlogged shell-holes, the fireworks in the air, the daily round of the trench, in the hospital, or in the quarters, and the wreckage, legitimate or otherwise, done by the enemy in retreat. In some of the later numbers he had to depend upon the pictures, which are of shipbuilding or of women making shells. His words are, I think, worthy of Bone's drawings. *Trench Scenery* has been quoted already; and here is an account of a fight in the air. It is a pity that Montague never saw a sea-battle. It is very hard in such incidents to remember aright what happened from

moment to moment, and then to set it down in language that is plain and stripped and also elegant.

The man in the trench sees the two incensed dragonflies speeding round circuit after circuit of one small circle, each seeming to chase the tail of the other. Suddenly one of the two checks and falls. Sometimes it rolls down sideways, turning over and over as children roll themselves down slopes of grass. Sometimes it tumbles head first—not quite headlong, but along a corkscrew line, fluttering down slowly like a dropped scrap of paper, with more of its wings showing at one moment and less at another. Sometimes it just falls headlong, like Lucifer, straight all the way to the earth. It may change on the way into a column of very black smoke and turbid flame. However it falls, if it does not take fire, its loss is not certain until it has crashed on the earth. Half-way or three-quarter way down it may pause, flatten out on its wings, and make off at the lower level, or pull out a little and climb up again to renew the encounter.

This passage is taken, not from *The Western Front*, but from one of the continuations to that work in the series called *Artists at the Western Front*. The artist here is Mr. C. R. W. Nevinson. Like each of the others, Mr. Paul Nash, Sir John Lavery, and Mr. Eric Kennington, he has a number to himself; and again the accompanist is Montague, who gives his impressions, while various other writers furnish professional notes upon the artists. 'Strange but True' is the title of his paper on Paul Nash; it is a defence of the painter's patterns of barbed wire and ghostly landscape. These are true, says Montague aptly, not to the daylight mood, but to the 'bedevilled and macabre vision' of soldiers who

return with almost shaken senses from the line, or to whom a straight duckboard, as they get along it under shell-fire, may seem to be viciously sloping and tilting over. In all these articles there are small sharp strokes; we hear of 'the great twilight field outside' the mess-room, 'to which belated members of the mess are returning *or not returning*'; and Bone's drawing of 'Ruined Trenches in Mametz Wood' brings up the memory of 'displaced sandbags, broken stretchers, and *boots not quite empty*'. The series ends in 1918; Montague was to publish no other book until 1922, when he came out with *Disenchantment*. The war scenes in *Fiery Particles* and in *Rough Justice*, later still, mark a further stage in the attempt not merely to set down his memories and thoughts, one 'fiery particle' after another, but to dramatise them in a story. Perhaps he never surpassed his brief, immediate reports of things heard and seen, which he did not feel bound to labour into intricate form; and in this domain, at any rate, he shows himself one of the few real writers of prose produced in England by the war.

VI

On January 12, 1918, Montague was back at Rollencourt. There was a pause in operations, and he played 'a good game of football'; but was 'intensely melancholy, these days', over the public situation. 'Now', he says, 'is the time to learn and practise fortitude, but it is hard.' It was to be harder still during the last great German advance. Meantime he found some fresh pursuits. He was asked to conduct a party of officers, mostly wounded or invalided, round the front,

in order that they in turn might learn to conduct bands of visiting munition-workers. He took them an arduous two days' journey in charabancs, often to be turned back by the mud; he was a 'Cook's guide', and paused at selected points to give short addresses, 'words of wisdom for future reference', which were taken down in short-hand by a corporal. One of the officers whom he conducted, and who had been in the trenches at Christmas 1914, told him this story:

On Xmas Eve the enemy lit up their whole front trench with Chinese lanterns. X and another officer went across No Man's Land, hailed the enemy, and asked for an officer. Germans told them to go back, or they would have to shoot. They said 'Not likely', went on to German wire, asked for an officer again, and eventually made a one day's truce for Xmas. English and Germans played footer together, exchanged cigarettes, etc. English intended no further regular truce, but decided not to shoot till Germans did. Next morning, Germans still seen breakfasting outside their wire. So our men got out of their trench too. One of our men, cleaning his rifle, let it off, and X went across to tell Germans it had been an accident. Apparently it was all right, but as he was coming back some German fired, and he was lamed for good, and has been three years at home. The truce ended.

Next Montague revisited Étaples, 'a sad city of the unfit, used-up, war-weary, and unwilling', where he met several old friends of the trenches, sergeants and sergeant-majors, who told him of other old friends killed, wounded, or discharged. February dragged along, but at last the coming German push was officially announced as expected in March, and this was a relief.

To Francis Dodd

Feb. 27, 1918

Thank goodness the slack slow months are nearly over. War is bad enough when it goes on, but when it pauses and the only things audible are the party and personal squabblings and squealings at home, it hath horrors that peace cannot equal.

The enemy attack was delayed; and time was filled up with the usual tours, and with bouts of badminton and football. In one match Montague scored the one goal for his side: 'I feel glad and relieved when I do well at footer—it would be horrible to be the old crock hanging on and tolerated among the lusty youngsters' (he was now fifty-one). On March 13 he is

still waiting, in divine halcyon weather, warmly sunny all day, lightly frosty each night, for the great smash. I play badminton for hours and begin writing out an anthology of the poems that I can repeat by heart.

The great smash began on March 21, and the party drove into Amiens, with lights out; 'we thread our way cautiously through crooked streets of city, in light mist and dim moonlight'. Then, from day to day, they learned of the loss of ground that they had seen won at so huge a cost the year before. The diary gives many of the dismal details, which are in all the histories, of front lines swamped, of units wiped out, and of civilians in retreat. But the histories were made afterwards, and Montague's practised burin preserves the traits that

most observers forget after a night's sleep.[1] One entry describes a common spectacle:

March 23.—Along the roads from Noyon and Roye westwards refugees stream in the sun and dust, wheeling their bedding and little belongings in wheelbarrows, trucks, perambulators, etc., sometimes a troublesome child sitting crying on the bundle. Some English soldiers walking that way lug a few of the heavier vehicles for the women. Our agricultural department is evacuating Roye and a stream of its steam ploughs clanks along the road, leaving the ploughing of the old battlefield unfinished. Great trains of ambulances on the road, and little strings of burying parties carrying dead men wrapped in blankets to the cemeteries outside the C[asualty] C[learing] S[tation]s. It is the first time I have seen the rear of a retreating army or felt the curious tingle there is in an atmosphere where the enemy may appear at any time.

Next day Amiens is bombed; but 'it is a morning fit for paradise, sunny, dewy, and fresh'.

My turn to stay in. When the others have gone out it is still and Sunday-like in the little sunny walled garden of the [Hôtel du] Rhin. A little dog, very much afraid, is wolfing the meat thrown out on the grass for the stork and sea-gull. They are uttering sounds of disgust from a far corner to which they have retired. A Persian cat has taken cover behind a plane-tree and watches the dog with fear and rage. All are terrified, and the most terrified, the dog, is also the profiteer. In the hall of the hotel foolish officers from the front are talking carelessly about the German advance, and terror is radiating from

[1] See below, pp. 204-6, for a more formal account of the Army in retreat.

them to waiters, porters, chambermaids, and so to the city generally. The enemy official *communiqué* comes in, claiming 25,000 prisoners and over 400 guns.

In the evening more bombs drop, and censors and pressmen are warned; their 'cars are ordered to stand by for retreat at a quarter of an hour's notice during night'. But it is four days before they fall back to the quiet of Rollencourt; and meanwhile they go out daily, so far as they may, to meet the retiring crowds. 'No trace', writes Montague, 'of haste, confusion, or panic in the retreat—quite phlegmatic. All the Eastern skyline is now German.'

In the next note, a long one, a soldier may see nothing remarkable; it is just the tale of a day's work; yet it may retrieve for him the impression of a long-past scene, going by once more as on a film; and for us civilians it is new. During part of the time Montague, for once left alone, is reconnoitring for 'Intelligence', much to his pleasure.

March 26.—With Perry Robinson and Mackenzie to 3rd Army H.Q., Beauquesnes. More visible agitation on the village green outside Army H.Q. than on several miles of retreating front line. Brigadiers and Maj.-Gens. walk up and down in pairs and use gesture like Frenchmen. I get hold of an acquaintance, Col. ——, who tells me it is touch and go, but if we can hold out till two, all will be right. Then I go to the Intelligence Office and get another Colonel (name?) to describe last night's losses to Mackenzie. Then on with P.R. [press representatives] to IV. Corps at Marieux and to V. Corps at Toutencourt. . . . At the V. Corps the usual confusion of the usual removal is going on,

but a very young Intelligence Lieut. tells us the details of yesterday's withdrawal from Albert quite coherently.

Then back to Amiens for lunch. Wild rumours are prevalent in Amiens that the enemy's cavalry are pressing on from Albert to cut off Amiens. I am sent out to see where the enemy is. On the way out I give a lift to Lahoussoye aerodrome to a pilot and observer, who tell me they were machine-gunned by enemy between Nesle and Chaulnes to-day and had to come down. About 5 kilometres from Albert the transport traffic is being diverted N. from road, as it is being shelled further on. I find it safe to take the car another 2 kilometres towards Albert and then leave it out of observation behind crest of last hill on road and proceed on foot. Find a good viewpoint about a mile W. of Albert, from behind a tree. No enemy yet in view this side of Albert, nor even in it, nor coming down slope of ridge behind it on the E. They are in sight trickling freely over the high ground further South and down towards Méaulte in the valley of the Ancre on my right, as if they meant to work round Albert instead of going at first through it. Pace of this advance not fast. Little parties of our men, relieved or ordered to fall back, stroll up the hillside in front of me, away from Albert, keeping well away from the road. Now and then the enemy takes a shot at them with a 4·5 or 9·2, and one shot kills 3 of them, but most shots miss. An Australian private mouches up the road from Albert, indicates the head of a champagne bottle in his pocket (no doubt looted from Albert) and asks me for a corkscrew. I tell him to go to Hell. An R.E. officer, in charge of a demolition party, stops to talk for a few minutes. So does a gunner Colonel in charge of a group of field guns to cover retreat.

My reconnaissance completed, I get back, from tree to tree, to the crest of the hill behind me, the enemy

now shelling the road with increasing energy. A little way ahead a shell pitches near a mounted man, disembowels his horse, and apparently breaks man's right leg. A passing M.O. tells me there is now no place nearer than Amiens (15 miles away) where the wound can be attended to, so that he will probably become a prisoner if left. I get him laid across the back of the car from door to door and drop him at No. 47 Hospital at Amiens. I report to Lytton, who commends my pains and decides, on the strength of my report, to keep the British and Allied Press at Amiens for one more night. Rumours of quick German advance come in all the evening, and the Mayor issues a proclamation that 'the enemy is at our gates', and counsels citizens to flee. Most of them do, and the streets are almost empty at dark.

From about 8 P.M. to 4 A.M. the enemy bomb us more profusely than ever before, coming over in relays about every 20 minutes or so. The first relay drops, among others, a bomb just outside our front door, killing two men and three horses of a gun-train, breaking our window and sending about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the company at dinner on to the floor. Cadge is uneasy lest our chauffeurs should have become casualties, and I go round and inquire at Hôtel Moderne. 'Vos chauffeurs, mon capitaine—ils ne sont pas rentrés.' I wonder, are they all about the town, becoming casualties. As I go back and am passing the Belfort, opposite the station, the second enemy relay lets fly. Two bombs seem to me to make direct hits on the station, but next minute I hear a train go through all clear. Others fall all about the town, but wide apart, though they give the sensation of a bombardment. I get back to the Rhin, passing a place where one of the bombs has scattered the street with dead horses. To bed at 12. Bombing goes on till after I am asleep—so I hear this morning, the 27th.

Cadge calls me up at 5.20 A.M. with an order from Lytton to stand to and get the whole establishment away as soon as possible, the enemy being reported near the town. Last car clears by 6 A.M. Bitter cold N.E. wind and sunless dawn. Reach Rollencourt at 7.30 A.M., breakfast, and then go out with Phillips to III. Army. . .

for another full day. But it is peaceful at Rollencourt, 'with no enemy round the corner'; and on the 28th there came

a blessed 8-hour sleep last night—no bombs or shells—only, through my open window, as I go to sleep and wake, the sound of the water at the mill-wheel. . . . At night I see in *Times* that Evelyn [his eldest son] is first at Magdalen, and am most happy with half my mind, the other half aching for Ted.[1] 'Will fortune never come with both hands full?'

March 29.—With Gibbs and Fyfe to No. 3 Canadian C.C.S. in the Vauban Citadel, Doullens. Great smell of blood everywhere. Casualties coming in freely. 2500 evacuated yesterday. 20,000 dealt with in last 8 days. Some of the cases mere bundles of cloth, mud, blood, and torn meat. Unpacked carefully by nurses, who despair of nothing still warm. While Gibbs and Fyfe circulate and question and take notes among walking wounded, an ambulance driver and a wounded Australian sergeant successively draw my attention to them as possible spies.

All through the disastrous weeks of April the party flitted along the familiar sections of the front, between the Somme and Flanders. From Cassel they sallied to

[1] His brother-in-law, Mr. Edward Scott, had been captured, as it proved, at St. Quentin on March 21, having at first been reported missing. He returned safe after the Armistice.

watch, from the 13th onwards, the fighting around Bailleul, and our withdrawals. 'It seems', wrote Montague, 'about like the situation before Agincourt, and we "even as men wrecked upon a sand, that look to be washed off by the next tide".'

Diary

April 14

We seem to have been ἐν ξυρῷ τύχης [on the razor's edge of fortune] on Friday [April 12], when there was a gap S. of Bailleul through which the enemy could have walked if he had known. The most deadly immediate danger now over; and the Empire may survive, but it is aleatory still; our battered army may recover itself as people do who are all but dead of an illness, though they are weaker when the turn comes than they were when they sickened. Nearly all the division which have been in the battle are now mere shadows, with a quarter to a half of their strength left, and those dead beat.

For the French he is all admiration.

To his Wife

April 22, 1918

Just before we left we were standing with the French Colonel looking at the end of the sunset behind our line, and suddenly all his guns, in a shadowy place under the sunset, broke out into a line of little twinkling sparks, starting a barrage to pass over our heads and fall a few hundred yards beyond, protecting us all. He pointed to them and said to me, 'Regardez, mon Capitaine! La guerre elle-même a sa poésie'—not a bit in a hackneyed or conventional way, but with boyish ardour

—really wonderful elasticity in anyone who has had long to bear the responsibility of front-line commands in this war and has done the work with all his might. The French are wonderful in their reserves of fortitude —what a wild, stupid saying it was of that person who called them 'delirious with suffering'! One can never admire too much their firmness and shining brightness of spirit, and if we can equal them we shall do finely.

The diary, in which the same story is told, adduces a case in point. An English colonel and his adjutant are

full of praise and delight at the work of the French staff officers under whom they now work, and the coolness of the men under fire. Our men were very few and dead tired when the French came into line on the 17th at night. They heard that a post of ours in Donegal Farm had been overrun and the officers and 12 men there not heard from. Within two hours the French had settled in, established all communications, dug shelters, given everyone his job systematically, and had raided Donegal Farm, and brought back word that they had found our officer and his 12 men dead in the Farm with about 50 German dead around them. This incident makes our men swear by the French.

The mortal suspense continued; and in a previous letter Montague had shown how he was moved by Sir Douglas Haig's proclamation.

To his Wife

April 13, 1918

I have just seen our C.-in-C.'s message in the papers, and it is exhilarating, in a way, to feel that it really *is* a close fight, for everything that matters, and not merely

a fight in which the only question is at what date we shall win. In all our old wars—Boer, Zulu, Afghan, etc.—we were not really putting a fair stake on the table, so to speak, because we could not possibly be destroyed by defeat, but only mortified a little. All the moral trial of the possibility of destruction was left to the other side. But now, if a life worth living is left to us after the war, we shall have taken it out of the fire, at real risk and cost, and it ought to make us more fit to use it worthily, and not carelessly or insolently as many people used to do. Of course one wishes enormously that the result was secure, and yet there is a kind of lifting of the heart from feeling that to be safe and great again we must give our proofs of strength and endurance.

VII

The diary records grimly and with little comment the stages of the enemy's advance, and the official information received as to the number and quality of their divisions; and breaks out again, not rarely, against the politicians and the press at home. These entries show that the mood of *Disenchantment* was boiling up. Meantime there are notes of passing humours, also slightly grim. An M.O.[Medical Officer] in charge of a Chinese Labour company gives his experiences:

He allows the Chinks a sort of ration of one day's sickness a month. For anything more a day's pay is deducted, but the Chinks have an insurance fund to cover this. But if a man is ill for some weeks, the insurance fund committee make him get well. The M.O.'s chief pet has a reputation as a murderer in China. He is a little man, all over knobs. The M.O. saw him once in a fight, with one of his adversary's fingers tightly held in

the murderer's teeth while he pummelled the adversary with both fists. The M.O. tells me it is understood by our authorities that at a burial the Chinese drop the body into the grave anyhow, and believe that if it pitches face uppermost the deceased is for Heaven; but if face down, for Hell. So, when a Chink dies here, we prudently put some lead in the seat of his trousers, so that due credit may be done to the service of Britain as an avenue to everlasting happiness.

All this time Montague nursed the vain hope that he would be allowed to go back and fight. He had already written:

To his Wife

April 5, 1918

It's some consolation for passing reverses that, the harder things go, the more chance is there that I may get back yet to my battalion or some other. I don't think I've ever missed a chance of trying, and I'm sure things could never go *very* badly without their calling back to combatant work everybody who had ever commanded anything in the field and is still able-bodied. But I'm so confident of our success that I don't feel any assurance that it will even come to this.

To his Wife

April 7, 1918

I hope everybody at home knows what a splendid thing the Americans did (it was published in the English papers some days ago) in agreeing to put in a lot of their troops to serve as parts of larger British and French units. One has to know the inside of an army to appreciate all the postponement of personal and national self-love and ambition that it meant. It may

have sounded merely technical, but it was really one of the greatest acts of chivalry of the war.

On May 2 he made a formal application. This was sent forward by Major Neville Lytton, then the officer in charge of the various press organisations attached to the British army in France. 'But', writes Montague, 'he won't promise to recommend it, on the ground of my being useful here.' I am allowed to quote Major Lytton's testimony:

Montague was one of the most splendid men I have ever met. Shakespeare's words about Brutus fitted him exactly:

> His life was gentle, and the elements
> So mixed in him that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, 'This was a man'.

He was a perfect gentleman, a perfect soldier. We all of us looked up to him—we would have liked to be such a man. . . .

His courage was, like all his other qualities, unique. When matters were going badly for us at the beginning of 1918, he volunteered to return to his regiment, but he was considered too valuable as a press officer. When an American section was formed, I offered him the post of officer in charge. This would have meant a rise in grade for him, but he preferred to remain with the British section. He never grumbled and he never ran anyone down. I think he would have liked to have nine lives to give the sacred cause for which we were fighting.

It would also have been madness to let him go back to the line at his age and after his former breakdown. He soon heard that he had been mentioned in despatches

of November 11, 1917, for 'distinguished and gallant services and devotion to duty'. He was to receive the same honour in despatches of March 7, 1918, and of March 16, 1919; and, on June 3, 1919, also the O.B.E.

On May 12 he looked round Amiens, never captured, but now deserted.

Urbs antiqua ruit. Many marks of shells. One has gone into my old bedroom at the Écu de France hotel. Only two clear shell-holes in cathedral—one in a side chapel on N.E. side of apse of choir, splitting the wooden figure of Christ, from head down; the other through the wall of the clerestory on S., just E. of the West front. A third and smaller hole in roof looks as if made by a splinter of a shell. The lovely rose windows in transepts not broken yet.

We eat our sandwiches in an empty street; whole city empty and dead still; the whistle of a light wind is only sound audible. Several starving cats, with sunk flanks and rectangular-looking, walk about the deserted streets weakly.

May 13.—[An American regiment] of all the white and approximately white races on earth, including the German. Many of them do not know English. One is a Chink, one a Syrian, heaps are Italian, Russian, Hungarian, Parthian, Mede, and Elamite. One of them, we hear, volunteered five times and was refused because of having a finger short. Then he was conscripted. We pass our Audricq munition dump, where the greatest of all dump explosions was caused by a German bomb in 1916, being seen or felt over N. France, and going on by instalments for days.

May 17.—The last few days have been all spring loveliness, hot sunshine, leisure, games—just as before the German attack on March 21.

May 20 [at Rollencourt].—Last night I began sleeping out in the meadow N. of the house—ground-sheet on the grass, sleeping-bag on the sheet, and my macintosh coat on top to keep out the dew. Delicious. Half-moon; all stars out; with my ear on ground I can trace the approach, passing, and departure of German bombing planes overhead, on the way to Boulogne and London, I suppose. I watch our rocket flares groping for them, and hear the Archies and a few distant bombing explosions, also the sounds of night-birds and little scuffling noises from roosting birds disturbed. Fall asleep about midnight and sleep splendidly till the hot sunshine awakes me at seven. Then have my swim in the river.

June 27.—One of the things that I like about sleeping out is that you rest without any withdrawal from life. You find that you had been losing something all those other nights that you passed in a kind of death-chamber, curtained and stilled, where the dark was toneless and ungraded, and all life's procession of fleeting changes in the qualities of air, light and sound came, for one-third of your time, to a dead stop, foreign to nature. Out of doors I sleep more deeply and awake more fresh and hungry for all that the day may bring; and yet my sleep has been no suspense of living; through some sort of film I have still perceived the life of the earth, as a child may sleep better for being dimly aware of the movement of its mother's rising and falling breath. And at moments of waking during the night, if any come, I am in the midst of things legible and reassuring; the note I hear is the nightingale's or the lark's; or the moon has crossed this or that width of sky; or the Plough has dimmed towards the dawn; and this clock that is all about you is somehow never surprising, like the strange hours you see on a watch in your hushed black room, but a curiously beautiful re-

assurance that all has gone steadily on while you were at rest. I never found a night tedious that I spent on guard as a private soldier, and never had a bad night of sleep on the ground, but always felt that I was more at friends than I was in a house with whatever god might be ordering everything round me. 'He is not dead, but sleepeth'—that is true if you sleep on the ground, it is only half-true if you sleep in a room and efface from one-third of your life a sense of the pulse of the world you live in.

This last entry, I think, deserves to become a *locus classicus* on 'sleeping out'; it is scribbled off, in faint pencilling and uncorrected, in the diary;[1] and it shows how a good rhythm, amongst other gifts of the gods, had become second nature.

To his Wife

July 29, 1918

If, as seems likely, it comes to another winter here, I *must* try to keep a little trickle of writing of some sort going, and not reading only, as I always feel as if the very little I have read is enough and the little I have written is not near enough, especially now that I have seen a lot of new and unexpected and interesting things. I wish sometimes I were a poet, because it seems as if little poems could be more easily written in such broken odd lengths of times as I get here.

VIII

There were now, he says, many 'vacant days' for his party; the German offensive, in its latter stages, went on; but his spirits had risen.

[1] Some of it is used again in *The Right Place*, p. 32.

To Edward Fiddes

June 1, 1918

I think everything is going all right, *au fond*, out here, and am sure the enemy will be worn down before we are. The Americans in line are great fellows, and one can't too much admire the John-Bullishness of French troops when times are difficult. You know what our men are, especially the Scotsmen and Lancastrians. It was almost lovelier to see them jogging back unconcernedly from St. Quentin, after three or four nights without sleep, than to see them advancing on the Somme, or, last year, in Flanders. One feels that such people can never be really beaten.

The notes become scantier, except for details of military movements, until July 15, the date of the great German attack—this time unsuccessful—from Champagne to the Marne. News comes of the French advance south of the Marne; and Montague writes: 'I tell the correspondents; and the joy of the Americans, who nearly cry, is good to see'. On July 18 the Allied counterstroke succeeds:

The French attack the enemy on a 40-kilometre front, from Château-Thierry to near Soissons—the Marne to the Aisne, and begin well. This is a delight—the first attempt at the execution of a large idea of strategic defence, the *mouvement classique*—to hit the enemy extensively on his flank when he hits you in front, instead of spending all your strength in resisting him frontally.

On August 8[1] the party had a view of the critical battle of Amiens, which is known to have been pronounced

[1] The impressions of the night before are told in *Disenchantment* (ch. xii.).

by Ludendorff the 'black day' for his armies. The Canadians and Australians attacked the salient before Amiens with all success; Montague heard the Australian General express his delight; and, visiting the field on the next day, he adds:

Not many dead on the battlefield of yesterday ; only single bodies; no groups. I only see one dead British soldier. Several batteries of enemy field-guns standing where they were captured, with the name of the capturing infantry brigade carefully chalked on them. Ground and road little shell-marked, nothing like Somme in 1916. Here the traces are those of real open warfare. Very few disabled tanks to be seen. Our men are dug in W. of Harbonnières [five miles S. of Bray-sur-Somme], with patrols out, and a few posts on the E. No continuous trench, nor any barricading of road, so that one might easily drive out right into No Man's Land till one stumbled on enemy, if careless:

> Improvisum aspris veluti qui sentibus anguem
> Pressit humi nitens trepidusque repente refugit
> Attollentem iras et coerula colla tumentem.[1]

There are similar notes throughout the month. Later, on the 24th, the party go over a familiar stretch east of the Ancre, won and lost in 1917, and now won again. They cross the river, go down from the north to Thiépval; mount the slope cautiously, 'scouting our way and half-expecting to see German helmets above the next tuft of grass'; but 'decide to go on carefully', and from the crest see German prisoners approaching under escort. A New Zealand cavalryman hands over

[1] 'Like a man who, pushing through rough brambles, treads on a snake he has not seen, and starts back in swift alarm as it rises in its rage and swells out its dark-blue neck' (Virgil, *Aeneid*, ii. 380-82).

to them others, successive relays whom he has ridden down:

I realise gradually that all the land round us on all sides is a warren with Germans in small parties hiding in it, not yet 'mopped up'. Our N.Z. cavalryman comes back with the three new captives, and I march off my little flock of seven. Nevinson questions them fluently in German and they agree, with expressive gestures, that 'they are fed up to the teeth with war'. On our left, as we go back, I see the enemy is shelling the Albert-Bapaume road heavily, and am glad we approached Pozières by the back way. Near Authuille I hand over my seven prisoners to the officer in charge of a collecting-place. We find the enemy trenches on the Thiépval ridge to have been left suddenly. Everything left as it was—rifles, equipment, a Prayer-Book, many letters, revolvers, a Verey light (which I lost), etc. We re-cross the Ancre and pick our way round in the car along cratered roads to near Albert, which we explore on foot. It is being shelled with much shrapnel and some H.E. and has a nervous atmosphere. Then home. A wonderful spectacle of open warfare, with fluid front lines, curious oblique relations between us and another part of front, and even some interfusion of opposite forces. . . . General —— tells us there are actual signs that the enemy may be cracking—one Corps has reported that resistance has almost ceased.

After an interval of leave Montague returned in September to the armies that were still hammering at the Hindenburg line, in the great 'battle of Cambrai-St. Quentin'. His notes are full of the plans that were communicated to the journalists day after day, from September 27 onwards. It was the five days' attack which led to the capture of Cambrai. They run about,

as usual, over the ground just gained, taking notes, and being 'told all about it' by generals and Intelligence officers. This particular offensive, the great victory that broke the German defensive line to bits, ends about October 5.

Oct. 2.—Lovely, these days, to see Amiens taking life again. There are said to be 10,000 people back, out of about 120,000. Everywhere windows are being mended, and in some places brickwork; a few more shops and restaurants are opened every day and one notices more people in the streets; the shell-hole in my old bedroom at the Écu de France is mended already, and one passenger train a day goes through the station each way. There are no police, no gas or electric light. In the slums, where I took a walk last night, there is a grim gloom such as I imagine at night in mediaeval cities. On the shutters of some of the closed shops are notices, 'Any British soldier found looting will be shot', and in many of the deserted shops one can see wares of some value through the windows. But there is an exhilaration about the beginnings of revival, like the renewal of youth that one feels when recovering from illness.

On October 4 they go into the Scheldt Canal tunnel at Bellicourt, and the diary gives the experience that is described in a chapter of *Disenchantment* ('Can't Believe a Word'): they come on the scene that helped to explain how the legend of the 'corpse-factory' had arisen; the horrid detail in the book is literally that in the diary. 'A fable that was current in 1916 and 1917, and foolishly encouraged, much to our discredit. I see now how easily such myths arise.' It was a day of incidents. As they came out of the tunnel they saw two planes, apparently ours, hit and dropping:

Neither bursts into flame. They seem to come down slowly in a spin, pausing and falling, like dead leaves on a still day. When one of them is about 500 feet from the ground an object detaches itself from it and descends more slowly, as the parachute opens out and comes into work. The man safely flutters down to the earth after the plane has crashed. No pilot or observer escapes from the other plane and it crashes.

Next day they are at Salome, east of La Bassée, and see the

German cemetery with between 1300 and 1400 graves. On those of 1914–16 are massive stone blocks and crosses. On those of 1917, heavy wooden crosses. On those of 1918, scraggy wood crosses, and they are huddled closer. The graves recede from the road, in order of date, so that the gradation is solidly clear and expressive.

On the return journey there is an accident. The chauffeur coasts downhill, and does not see in time the closed iron gate of a level-crossing; a train is coming;

he puts on both his brakes, but the near back wheel skids, the car turns sideways, then right round, and goes on, rear foremost, at 30 miles an hour into the gate. It smashes and twists the iron gate, and partly wrecks the car, but by a curious piece of luck the car does not turn over when sliding sideways nor when it is pulled up by the ruins of the gate. One of the iron uprights holding the gate is bent over the line and loosened at its foundations, and seems likely to hit and perhaps detrain the coming train. I manage to lug it round a little, but it springs back into the bad position. The only way I see of managing it is to hold it away by hard lugging till the train goes past. I only just succeed

in holding it out of the way, for parts of two trucks just touch it, and clang rather baulkingly, and the wheels are uncomfily close to my head.

IX

Cambrai was re-entered on October 9, and next day, on being visited, proves to be less damaged than had been feared; our shelling and bombing of it must have been slight. In Bohain, on October 12, they hear the tales of the villagers, 'starving and waxy-looking and sunken-faced', who state that 'English prisoners got even less food and were beaten with butts of rifles when too weak to work'. 'The town, half-burnt by the Germans when leaving, is still smouldering.' Next day they are 'thrown into great delight' by the news that the Germans have 'surrendered to Wilson's Fourteen Points, plus evacuation'. But the attack, or rather pursuit, of course goes on. They get into Ostend, and 'crawl along a broken pier to see the *Vindictive*, now lying close along the E. Pier'. Bruges is little spoilt in spite of the looting of copper and of bits of sculpture; they are greeted and cheered by crowds, and 'ladies come up and shake hands and talk cordially'. 'Everyone simplified by emotion', writes Montague; adding, from his favourite Virgil,

Ergo omnis longo solvit se Teucria luctu.[1]

But the party had been overworking; influenza and other ailments laid several of them out; and they are also 'quelled by the work'.

[1] 'So then all the land of Troy feels released from its years of woe.'

'The grasshopper shall be a burden.' The old press system, good enough for trench warfare and Haig's minutely progressive battles, is breaking down with the great distances and long fronts of Foch's advance.

Soon they got back to Rollencourt, enjoying 'a fine mild night and the usual thrill of rushing along the dark roads'. There they heard of President Wilson's reply to Germany; and Montague's political hopes and fears and antipathies, never far from his mind, rush out:

I hope our greedy and bloodthirsty non-combatants and profiteers . . . will hold their tongues. But there are signs of eager baseness about—demands for territory for ourselves, for a share of what Germany can pay. If the caterpillars of the commonwealth had their way, our part in this war, noble at first, would end in meanness, and the British nation's greatest chance of distinction in all its history would be thrown away.

A picture follows of Lille. The Germans had spared most of it because they wanted to live in it; but, in order to terrorise the citizens, they had razed utterly certain great slices of it, which I saw, still unrepaired, in the year after the war. Montague does not record this fact; but his general impression is precise:

Oct. 26.—Handsome, cheerful city, the houses full of bourgeois comfort and almost stateliness, not exquisite like those of Renaissance Venetian merchants, but more effective than those of Manchester and Birmingham and indicating more education and connoisseurship.

They next moved their Press establishment to Lille, and visited the cemeteries there, British and German. In the latter there was

a huge stone monument to them collectively, with a nude figure to which the French are objecting threateningly on the score of decency, as people did to the Shelley monument at Oxford.—Bad to think of these British prisoners, exiled, half-starved, dying squalidly in the slavery of the prisoner-of-war. Some Lancashire names among them.

Oct. 31.—A bad thing, these days, is to see how like Prussians many people talk now that we seem likely to be able to practise Prussian insolence. No

> Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento,
> Parcere deiectis et debellare superbos.[1]

We have now the most stirring opportunity any nation ever had to show greatness in victory, but there is grievously hard pressure on the side of showing littleness and so poisoning the future of the world.

They follow eastwards, with our advance; and there is a note on the aspect of Valenciennes, retaken early that very morning, November 2, by our cavalry:

We get in from the W., about one P.M., over a pontoon bridge, near the wrecked and burnt railway station. At first the town seems empty. A dead German is lying in middle of station square; and, 100 yards on, is a vacant sniper's post in a shop-door at a street corner, with about 100 rounds of S.A.A. [small arms ammunition] scattered on a little office table on the pavement. Presently we see heads emerging timidly at few windows and doors, smiling and waving to us. They seem like frightened rabbits just taking heart to peer out of their burrows. Heavy machine-gunning going on in

[1] 'Roman, take heed; with thy imperial sway
Govern the nations; crush the arrogant,
Show mercy to the beaten.'
Aeneid, vi.

S.E. of town. Enemy also shelling town and our guns firing over it very hard. We go on to central *Place*, and here a few municipal officials come out of shelters and welcome us and tell us their experiences, and take us on to a long vaulted cellar where the acting Mayor and his family have been living. We wait about an hour, the correspondents gathering information. Then we say good-bye and clear out. Our gunfire has now become drumfire, and the din of this and the bursts of enemy shells are apparently keeping the 4000 civilians in their cellars. We hear a knock at one window as we pass, and it is thrown up, and an aged man with a rigid face, spiked moustache and imperial, and with tears pouring down his face, wrings our hands hard for a long time. His grand-daughter, apparently, tells us he was a Capt. of Artillery in 1870, and shows us his photograph in uniform then, in his strength. We re-cross the pontoon bridge to our car and go back to Lille.

On November 4 they read that 'the Austrians lay down arms at 3 P.M. to-day'; and Montague utters a wish which it is easy to share:

O that I might have had the chances the war correspondents have wasted of describing this war. With a little skill at writing, a little geographical knowledge and imagination, a little scientific imagination to interpret strategy, a little knowledge of Marlborough's and Wellington's Low Country campaigns and of the war of 1870, a man might have written, piecemeal, a book that would be read for ever. Some of the correspondents have been disabled by a public-school education, some by incapacity for topographic vividness and imaginative grasp, all, more or less, by the absurd system of trying to wire, in the afternoon, accounts of the day's fighting.

News, in these last days, came in fast; that the German envoys were on the road, that Bavaria had declared a republic, that the Kaiser had abdicated.

Nov. 10.—With Nevinson and Beach Thomas to Tournai, captured by us yesterday. Sunny, cold day, and everyone radiant. Civilians in streets shake hands and say 'Merci' and 'Que nous sommes contents de vous voir!' A battalion of Black Watch march through the town with their pipes playing and crowds cheering. In the Cathedral a great service is going on, with the Bishop on his throne.

On November 11 they passed through Orchies (a place which, as I happen to know, was partially burnt out by the enemy in 1914, in punishment for some alleged offence):

There, about 9, in the G office of VIII. Corps, I get the news that the war is to be over at 11 this morning. With all speed we go through Valenciennes towards Mons, which we know was in enemy's hands last night. E. of Jemappes a big crater in the road stops us, but I find a way round through Cuesmes and we motor into Mons at 11 to the moment. Many aeroplanes flying low over the front lines dropping signal flares. The only German we see as we go into Mons is a dead one lying under the Boulevard trees. As we go in, the streets are crowded with civilians, cheering and waving flags and shouting English words to us. In the square troops of the 3rd Can. Div. are drawn up in mass before the Town Hall. The G.O.C. comes in, stands up in his car, and orders caps off and three cheers for King Albert, and we give him four. Then the thousands of people in the square and at all the windows and balconies sing the *Brabançonne* while we stand at salute. One of the General's G.S.O. tells me the enemy left Mons in the night.

So, for the British, the war ends where it began; and, in being driven along the Rouen-Brussels road from Mons to Albert, and fighting back along it to Mons, the Allies have broken Prussianism and saved the world. Back through Valenciennes to Lille. On coming in I write my application to relinquish my commission and to have leave pending retirement.

Nov. 14.—To Ghislenghien, our furthest point at present along the Brussels Road. We motor about a mile further, meeting an almost constant stream of men between 15 and 60, formerly deported by the Germans to Brussels and now returning. Also hundreds of released or escaped British and Italian prisoners of war, the British ones marching back to our lines steadily in little squads under a N.C.O. or the oldest soldier. I stop and question two of these squads, who tell us how about 1000 of them broke out of a P. of W. cage near Brussels on hearing the armistice was signed. German officers tried to stop them, but the guards did not fire on them. Others say that at their cage they were set free by their guards. All who have come through Brussels describe the German troops there as in mutiny and firing with m.g.'s into the windows of their officers' quarters. Our men got no rations towards the end, or on their way back, but all say, 'The civilians were very good to us'. A D.R. whom I stop tells me he is coming back for ambulances, as some ten of our returning men are dead or dying by the road, from hunger and exhaustion, about ten kilometres further on. The civilians returning cheer us eagerly and tell us we are the first British uniforms they have seen. I am much struck with the bearing of our men. They wear an ugly black uniform, but are very smart, soldier-like, and intelligent in their answers: in splendid contrast with the Italians, their *moral* has not suffered a bit from their imprison-

ment since Nov. 1917 or longer. At Ghislenghien a 5th Army Intelligence officer is waiting for a German officer, expected to come down the road under white flag. He gives me a message to the Army at Lille. . . .

It was very happy on the road to-day, with the sun shining warmly and the crowd of returning civilians all beaming with joy and friendliness while they sweated and slipped along the greasy road, lugging their barrows and hand-carts, and our returned prisoners marching along containedly but wildly happy to be free, as one saw on speaking to them.

x

Some of these scenes reappear in a letter, which gives a retrospect.

To Francis Dodd *Nov.* 18, 1918

It has been a wonderful progress eastwards, always coming into new towns and villages where the people rushed out and shook hands and kissed us—I always dodged this, though—and sometimes offered us pieces of bread, thinking we must be half-starved like themselves and the German troops. When the war ended I had the luck to be at our front at the very place from which the old army was forced to retreat in 1914, and it was great when eleven o'clock went and the Belgian civilians and we crowded together into the village square to rejoice. They played 'Tipperary' on the parish church bells and we all sang the two National Anthems and cheered King Albert and felt it had all been worth while. What luck I've had through it all—been sniped at dozens of times, and splashed with earth and little morsels of shell and never scratched; and when I *was* blown up at my bomb-instructing they said it was almost

a scandal that so much good explosive had not finished me. . . .

The day after the fighting ended I met hundreds of our men who had been prisoners near Waterloo and broken out just before the armistice. They were coming back into our lines, almost starving, and some of them had died of hunger and exhaustion on the way; but they came along splendidly, marching in little groups under the command of the oldest soldier in each, with their horrible black uniforms as clean and neat as hard trying could make them, marching along very steady and smart and taking no notice of anybody. I thought I had never seen the British soldier to greater advantage.

It's fine that you are committed to many official visits to Manchester. You must always tell us beforehand and stay at No. 10. I'm actually in hope of being home by Christmas, and then won't there be gardening in the front garden and wood-chopping in the yard with my sage L. and J.! I know that beatitude one gets when absorbed in doing things to the earth. And, my God, what a time it will be at home next spring when the evenings lengthen and the crocuses come out. One gets exclamatory in one's letters, these times, because one's heart is crying out so loud all the time, with nothing to check it but the fear lest we all get too far away from humbleness and blunder into some insolent mistake.

I want badly to see your submarine pictures, and a lot of others too. I was jolly glad to see you were a Major.

On another day, says the Diary, an English civilian, talking to a colonel of the Regular Army, utters the usual jaunty stuff about the French army being disappointed at not having a week's more war. The Col. looks at him pretty drily and says, 'It wouldn't be worth one drop more of blood'. This illustrates fairly

the difference between the soldier's and the secure, bloodthirsty non-combatant's attitude towards war.

On November 21 they were in Brussels, now crowded and beflagged to await King Albert:

Many bands and much street singing. At night we dine at Restaurant Petit Louvain. When we get up to go a big Belgian family at next table rise and shout all together, 'Heep, heep, hourra pour les Anglais!' We thank them disconcertedly and escape.

After the celebrations at Brussels (Montague making the arrangements for the Press to see the King's entry) and after a visit in fog to Waterloo—Victor Hugo's *morne plaine*—they went back to Lille. By December 5 they were on their way to Germany, and drove at night to Aix.

All the stars bright, and the broad stretch of lighted plain near Eschweiler lovely as we come down on it from the hills. The old joy of rushing through the night along unknown roads possesses me, with a new thrill from passing through a land of people who fear and hate us. I notice that the North Star is twinkling away always some twenty or thirty degrees on our left;

and he puts the driver, who has strayed, on the right road. At Aix and at Cologne, which they reach on December 8, Montague is troubled by the looks of the people—'impassive, but as if they hated us, which hurts me'; and, still more, by the occasional arrogance of certain British officers towards the civilians. One of our correspondents, who was then with him, wrote after his death:

As was to be expected he showed every courtesy and

friendly consideration to a proud but defeated people, and if other officers in all the Allied armies had acted and spoken to Germans as Montague instinctively did, peace would have come sooner and remained more secure.

He is also busy finding quarters for 'British, Allied, neutral, and American Presses'; sees the cathedral; and goes to the play, admiring the Neues Stadttheater, the arrangements of which are 'splendid, better in every way than any theatre I know in England'.[1] As the infantry march into the cathedral square, 'the men's eyes go up, from back-turned heads, looking for the tops of the western towers of the cathedral, which are in moving cloud, like Chamonix aiguilles'. The war correspondents now begin to melt away; the Commander-in-Chief meets them in state, 'shakes hands with each kindly and shyly, as his way is', makes a little speech,[2] and adds the words, which are worthy of remembrance and are of the kind that went to Montague's heart:

'For my part I sincerely hope that in our time of victory we may not lose our heads, as the Germans lost theirs after 1870, with the result that we are here.' He gives each of the correspondents a small Union Jack 'like the one I carry on my car'.

This was on December 16; and a long letter to his brother is the best record of these weeks:

[1] After his return he wrote to Mr. R. Crompton Rhodes (March 27, 1919): 'The only plays I saw during the war were the *Dynasts* in London, when I was a recruit, and a lot of operas in Cologne, where the municipal opera-house and theatre filled me with bitter envy. Birmingham and Manchester ought to take them as part payment of the indemnity.'

[2] Quoted, with some verbal differences, *Disenchantment*, p. 181.

To F. C. Montague

G.H.Q., France, *Dec.* 12, 1918

I am not in France at all, in spite of my address, but at Cologne, and have been getting, with great interest, my first views of the cathedral and of this part of the Rhine. I only knew it above Bâle before, and best at its birthplace. I enjoy the cathedral much more than the sniffing of purist critics of it had led me to expect. I don't find it such a fascinating system of tangled glooms as some Gothic churches, but still, in its interior, a really nobly planned building. It may not be of the very first rate, but in it the second-rate is a thing very well worth having. For the Rhine here and at Bonn I can't express all my admiration. Till I saw the Seine between Rouen and Havre, from a hospital-ship, I did not believe any other river could be so beautiful, in a new way, as the Thames is in its, but now I see that there is yet a third way in which a river can be peerless. To-day I saw our first troops cross it by the great Hohenzollern Bridge, under the Cathedral, and march off eastwards.

I had the luck to be at our front line at Mons at 11 A.M. on November 11, and to see the war end where, for us, it had begun. As soon as the clock struck all the aeroplanes in the sky began turning somersaults and cart-wheels and firing *feux de joie* of signal lights and executing every *pas d'extase* that they could think of, and the Belgian civilians and we crowded together in their market square and shook hands on it, and the parish church bells rang 'It's a long, long way to Tipperary' with a most comical cheerful effect. Then I went to Brussels to see the King of the Belgians come back to his house, and since then I have been flying about somewhere or other near the front of our march into Ger-

many. Much the finest thing, it seems to me, that I have seen, in the architectural line, is the old Carlovingian part of the cathedral at Aix-la-Chapelle—I expect you know it. I do not care how soon I can get home now. *Sat militavi*, and the fifth Christmas of my soldiering will hang heavy out here. . . . I find I don't much enjoy prosecuting my conquests in Germany. Now that the thrill of fighting and of having the air infested with remote but oxygenating risks of all sorts is all over, a curious flatness comes, and it hurts to live among so many people who must all dislike us, even though they have given us more reason to dislike them. I rejoiced to see your manly fist in the *Times* the other day. Your general election does not seem a very exalted business, from the little I see of the great and wise men's speeches in it, and I feel jealous for my cool and sensible old friends in the ranks out here, very few of whom, I fear, will manage to get in their votes. The politicians might have waited for us, I think.

How are you? We must meet soon, when I am demobilised. Good-bye, and good luck. Ever your affectionate brother.

He was at Lille, on his way home, on January 1: and wrote in his diary, 'Empty, long days of waiting for my return to England on the 3rd. Am 52 to-day. No time to waste.' On the 3rd he was back with his family.

Jan. 4.—In afternoon, in snow and gloom, to the Dispersal Camp at Heaton Park, where I hand in my papers and get my 'Protection Certificate' of official release from the Army.

So ends my soldiering.

To F. C. Montague

FALLOWFIELD, *Jan.* 8, 1919

Behold me here, demobilised on Jan. 4 and fast learning how to take off my hat on meeting a woman I know.

'My tin hat now shall be a hive for bees.'

. . . I'm sorry there was an election when so many of us were prevented from taking part, but don't fear that much harm will be done before the mixed flood of reasonable and unreasonable disappointments causes some corrective, if it is wanted. I feel more inclined than ever to the heresy that all parties are right, and indispensable, however much any of them may lose its head now and then; the reserve strength of the inherent decency of human nature is so big that the mess is almost certain to be mopped up. Not, of course, that this absolves one from the obligation to deprecate head-losing.

To Francis Dodd

FALLOWFIELD, *Jan.* 11, 1919

Behold me, too, a civilian again and fumbling for the right place to take hold of a billycock hat when I meet any woman I know—but elated every morning at getting straight into slacks and not having to lace up breeches and top boots. They demobbed me on Jan. 4, and it feels fine and still quite new. As to work, I'm divided between hunger to get at it and an extraordinary stiffness in the working apparatus, so that I don't see how I shall ever get anything done in time again. But I'm a great hand at sawing down trees at The Firs with our younger kiddies, and sitting in front of the drawing-room fire with M. subsequently, while they

burn. . . . Very glad you had that great time with the Fleet. I find that seeing extraordinary events does not in the least spoil one's enjoyment of ordinary ones or of quite eventless times. The big events and experiences seem like a kind of cake that somehow makes bread eat better than ever after it.

CHAPTER VII

LATER YEARS

I

THE narrative now becomes simple. For six years Montague settled down to his work on the *Manchester Guardian*, taking his annual holiday; and during this period he published three books. In 1925 he retired, but he had then less than three years to live, during which he published one book more. This quiet chronicle is reflected in his letters. But when he returned from the war he was quiet only in appearance. He was hot with indignant and melancholy memories of the past four years. They did not come at once to the surface, but gradually found expression in his *Disenchantment*, in some of his stories, and also in his journalism.

To Oliver Elton

May 10, 1919

Thank you much for your friendly hail. I was demobbed early in the year, having wangled it on the pretence of being 'pivotal'. Am now trying to get used to the life of honest labour again, but my working apparatus is stiff and sticky after these years of pleasure and deevilment. . . . I am much younger than I was, and my only marks are some dirty spots on my face, from products of combustion that could not be dug out. I saw nothing of the war while taking part in it with my battalion. The trenches were the remotest backwater in Europe for 9-10th of the time. Towards the end I saw the war well as I was put on to take Haig's visitors, foreign

military attachés, etc., about our front, and afterwards to do the same for the British and American war correspondents. They let me write drivelettes of 'letterpress' for Bone's and other picture-books in the spare time when I wanted to write to my wife.

To Francis Dodd

Christmas Day, 1920

I've put myself in peril of your scorn, later on, by having a shot at a serious yarn [? *Rough Justice*], all that there is of romance and sentiment, about which my agent is now haggling with ——. It makes one's face tingle to think of it—I never knew before what a frightfully intimate confidence one makes to a reader when one gives up the ironic fencing game and writes, in all the defencelessness of one's own emotions, about anything that matters. Probably, if it ever comes out, it will seem all mushy and maudlin;—you must read it and tell me, honest, if so, that I may have a go at retrieving it with another afterwards.

To Percy Withers

May 8, 1921

I have been immensely surprised about the warmth of the feeling about C. P. S[cott]. He deserves anything, but in this world of fallen skies and queer moralities it seems unlikely that more than a few of us cranks should much admire a man for having been honest 50 years. Wonderful old world, really, with its huge reserves of decency!

The allusion here is to the celebration of Mr. Scott's fiftieth anniversary as editor of the *Manchester Guardian*; it was also the centenary of the paper. Montague, to his satisfaction, was able to be present.

To Allan Monkhouse

SEATOLLER HOUSE, BORROWDALE, KESWICK,
Oct. 26, 1921

This place is uncommon good, as it commonly is. P. would call us *fainéants* at the climbing, but we walk about like good ones and have our feet wet always. During the long comfy evenings we read Wells's *Outline of History* aloud with vast excitement and pleasure and some regrets for our wasted youth. At my Elizabethan grammar school and pre-Elizabethan university I only learnt that there were first the Jews, then the Greeks, then the Romans, and then the British, though it was partly admitted that some inconsiderable Hittites, Egyptians, Persians and Carthaginians might have had a kind of semi-life in the outer darkness. A wildly advanced fourth-form master told me that I might put inverted commas round 4004 B.C. as the date of the creation. It was wonderful to read a history with perspective, and I don't care what mistakes he may have made about the reputation of Alexander the Great.

To F. C. Montague

SEATOLLER HOUSE, BORROWDALE, KESWICK,
Oct. 27, 1921

Your letter has just overtaken me in this beloved place, where M. and I are having a fortnight's holiday —to end next Tuesday, a murrain on it. We usually come for a short holiday each year to this house, which is one of the best remaining specimens of the old Cumberland 'statesman's' house and wondrously comfortable. We walk or climb all day in the eye of Phoebus,[1]

[1] 'From the rise to set
Sweats in the eye of Phoebus, and all night
Sleeps in Elysium.' (*Henry V.*, IV. i.)

or under such rains as obscure it, and at night sleep in Elysium.

To H. W. Nevinson

March 23, 1922

You give me real delight by what you say of my book [*Disenchantment*]. You were one of the few people of whom I often thought, when writing it, with the wish to make it come out right if you should read it. I simply crave for any praise of it from people who have seen the war and who understand—partly as a sort of glycerine to put on my skin where it's chapped by letters from the kind of Regular Army man who is honestly puzzled that anyone should say such nasty things about him and his friends. One might mind hurting them less if there were not so many of them among the most likeable people on earth, as many of the good sailors are too.

Mr. Nevinson, who had seen much of Montague during the latter weeks of the war and after the Armistice, has described him with whole-hearted affection in his recent volume, *Last Changes, Last Chances*. Montague, it may be said, felt more akin to him than he did to many of the other correspondents, his good friends; and the reader of Mr. Nevinson's works will see why. For one thing, the two shared in many of the emotions and opinions uttered in *Disenchantment*. The book had now appeared, and may be said to have made Montague's name with the wider public, at home and in America.

II

He had dropped all presswork during the war and came back to it with energies refreshed. The war awakened all his powers and supplied him with a

greater subject than he had ever had. He resumed the old round, as lieutenant-editor, leader-writer, and reviewer; criticised plays once more, made notices of many books, and wrote from time to time on mountaineering and topography. On the political side, many of the issues were new. Many of the causes for which he had combated were won. Home Rule indeed was still to come; but the Parliament Act was passed, the women had got their vote, and the campaign for Protection was in abeyance. The judgment on the war, the sequel of the war, and the peace settlement were the great questions. The *Manchester Guardian* opposed the adventure of the British arms in Russia, and joined in criticising the Versailles treaty. It also condemned General Dyer's action at Amritsar. Montague took his share in these comments; but he was chiefly concerned with retrospect. Few men were acquainted with the Western front from so many points of view. He was no longer tied by discipline, and could speak out freely of anything that he had not learnt in confidence. The scenes and impressions which have been described in the last three chapters were stamped on his mind; and on many of them he had put down his notes. Though not a professional historian or student of tactics, he was in a position to judge and often to correct a number of the books that dealt with the war in the West. He had a clear opinion upon the mistakes or achievements in France of French, of Gough, and of Allenby. He wrote a balanced account,[1] as an eye-witness, of the retreat of the Fifth Army on March 21, 1918, and pleaded for a

[1] *M.G.*, Jan. 28, 1921: 'The Case of Sir Hubert Gough', by 'an Ex-officer'.

juster judgment of General Gough than the official finding. His own record of those days has been quoted (pp. 203-7). Again, in an initialled article,[1] he tackles 'the old myth that in 1918 the war had to be torn from an unwilling Foch, as a bone that is still meaty has to be torn from a dog that is still hungry'. Still as an eye-witness, Montague describes at length the weariness of our army, the 'shrinking transport power', the drain on the resources of 'our Q side' which had to issue five million rations to famished civilians; also the probable losses of men, and devastation of territory, which it would have cost to prolong the fray. The article is one of a number printed in the same year; and out of these were culled most of the chapters of *Disenchantment*.

The following letter shows the spirit in which that book was written.

To Conrad Russell *April* 6, 1922

It seemed an open question to me too whether it was better to write anything like a book, or just go on trying to forget the whole bitter business. Then I felt sure that at bottom I did not feel despondent, in spite of it all. Though such a lot of us had failed, there was still the enormous inherent decency and resoluteness of the nation when things were worst—the marvellous rightness, as you say, of the ordinary man in the trenches, and the quiet soundness of which one used to get glimpses among people at home—little things like the severity of voluntary rationing practised in out-of-the-way places, as well as stoicism under losses. Besides, the war surely showed us the worst there was to be seen, and the reactive instinct, which seems to count

[1] *M.G.*, July 24, 1920: 'A Foch legend'.

for a good deal, was likely now to work in the direction of decency.

Of course things are pretty bad still—the peace above all—but there does seem, since the war, to be a feeling growing up among people that there is no future for us unless we can see clearly what has been wrong, and try hard to get straight.

I wanted, when writing, to get in both these sides of the thing—the 'miserable sinners' and 'no health in us' side, and also the hope of pulling through. But probably the former comes out disproportionately big in the book, and the impression must, I'm afraid, be strengthened by the one-sided title *Disenchantment*, which ought to have been *A Near Thing* or *A Warning* or something suggestive of bad but not irreparable failure. At the worst I only feel that we are a little like France, as seen by Zola, at the end of the *Débâcle*—an awful mess, but the sane sagacious peasant still there, with the 'grande et rude besogne de toute une France à refaire'.

As a piece of writing (even apart from the argument) *Disenchantment* fairly earned its success. The planning is careful; there are none of the shackles of a story, and the subject is real, not invented. In the author's letters and diaries we can scan some of the material; the plain stuff is there, which is wrought up in the book with so much passion and elaborate wordcraft. Sometimes, I think, the plain stuff is better as it stands; but the reader can judge. There are pages in *Disenchantment* where the voice rises very high. Others, more restrained, are more effective, and the satire seems to suggest a study of Swift, one of Montague's favourite authors. The chapter on 'Our Moderate Satanists' is an example. Not the Swift of *Gulliver*, but the Swift of *A*

Tale of a Tub, with its wild wit and unslackening irony. But Montague is, to begin with, too humane, and has too much faith in his fellows, for such a parallel to go further. His prose has acquired a stronger rhythm; and there is a new, delicate, and unborrowed gift of picturing. This little *poème* gives the landscape seen from Cassel hill:

> Everywhere lustre, reverie, stillness; the sinking hum of old bees, successful in life and now rather tired; the many windmills fallen motionless, the aureate light over the aureate harvest; out in the east the broken white stalks of Poperinghe's towers pensive in haze; and, behind and about you, the tiny hill city, itself in its distant youth the name-giver and prize of three mighty battles that do not matter much now.

The book is not only a performance, but an historical *mémoire pour servir*. It is not a formal record, nor is it an argument that can be threshed out in court. It expresses the bitter mind of a multitude, the still young, the returning survivors of the New Army. The author, older than most of them and much more articulate, catches from their slang, their casual curses, their stories, and from his own observation of their fates, the spirit of what they came to feel, the spirit of 'disenchantment'. It is a revulsion from what they had felt when they first went out to war; and this too, in his opening chapter, Montague expresses with great beauty. Most of the book is a fierce satiric exposition, into which all this material is woven. Passionately he gives voice to the feeling that the Territorials, who had done the work, had been denied the glory. There are many scapegoats: the old Regular Army, especially the officers; the misdoings of G.H.Q.,

the vices of the public school system and of English class-feeling, which are supposed to lie behind the blunders. Montague resolves to be fair, and puts in many a saving tribute to what was well and duly done. Whether his concessions go far enough is a question for the regular historians. He states, with all certitude, the case for the prosecution. He is, indeed, always reminding us that he records not what the 'disenchanted' ought to have said, but what they *did* say, under their breath or aloud. Yet he clearly thinks that most of it is true; for upon it he builds his own hostile analysis, and goes on to propound, not unhopefully, his cure for the mischief. The cure is the old one—to practise humility, to remember the lesson, and to work soberly on and try to educate the 'creative faculty of delight'. Whatever be thought of Montague's indictment, his *picture* of a frame of mind that was common to thousands of soldiers bids fair to stand; no one else has caught it. There is also his admirable gallery of types: the all too hearty chaplains, who could drink hot blood and who saw not the strange, shy gleams of religion in the heart of the soldiers; the counterparts of Shakespeare's Gates and Williams, who served at Agincourt; and the privates who fed from their own rations the German children at Cologne.

III

To F. C. Montague

Dec. 21, 1922

Separate from this M. and I send you, with best Christmas and New Year wishes, the *Forsyte Saga* by Galsworthy of New College. You mustn't read it if you firmly bar these moderns on principle, but I hope you

will. He seems to me about the most veracious of those who have tried to describe the well-to-do Britons of his time, with their differences from the kind about whom we used to read in Thackeray and Trollope and G. Eliot —and now their differences from the post-war crowd become interesting too. . . .

From Fiji comes a rumour of your intending to retire. Is it e'en so? And is it from London only, or will you give yourself wholly to the writing of your books? I peg away at mine, such as they are, for the first two after-breakfast hours of my multifarious days, and a new one, made up of several hirplin' tales that have come out from time to time in *Blackwood* and elsewhere, is to appear in a couple of months. I am struggling, too, with the consequences of a recent publication of my little *Disenchantment* in America, where it seems that everyone who reads a book sits him down and writes to the author.

The tales in question, which do not in fact 'hirple', that is limp, at all, are collected under the title of *Fiery Particles*, and are nine in number. The 'fiery particles' are the souls of the 'ardent cranks', the 'arrant lovers of living', the questers and Quixotes, one of whom figures in each story and each of whom lives in his dream or mad adventure. In four of them he is an Irishman, talking Irish-English. Of this idiom Montague had an easy command. I have never found out where he got it from—partly, no doubt, in the army, in the trenches; his sergeants and privates talk it; he had, apparently, only paid one short visit to Ireland. Nor do I know whether it is correct; but it reads right to an Englishman, like the same language in the plays of Synge. A little goes a long way with a quick ear.

Toomey went on. 'I knew, when I held up the dog on the palm of me hand, ye'd see where I was, an' where goin'. Then I wint on, deep into th' East. Their wire is nothin' at all; it's the very spit of our own. I halted among ut, and gev out a notus, in English an' German, keepin' well down in the fog to rejuce me losses. They didn't fire—ye'll have heard that. They sint for the man with the English. An', be the will o' God, he was the same man that belonged to the dog. "Hans", says I, courcheous but firm, "the dog is well off where he is. Will you come to him quietly?" '

This German pup is swapped back for a dead German soldier; the Colonel had promised a fiver for any such memento; and Toomey goes on his quest through the 'Garden', a fog-bound *unheimlich* spot which got upon everyone else's nerves with its undergrowth and silence. In its double quality of comedy and grimness this story stands perhaps above the rest. But they show great variety, and cannot all be recited here. 'The First Blood Sweep' comes straight from the trenches; there is North country dialect, and Cockney, and Irish again; the 'sweep' is won by whoso draws the name of the first man in the trench that shall be killed; and the hero is the sergeant, a great fellow who is blown to bits. One tale, 'Honours Easy', is in the vein of *Disenchantment*, and tells of the race of two 'heroes' for unearned decorations in the war. 'My Friend the Swan' is another extravaganza: a humorist, a pretended crank, picks the cryptogram 'William Hohenzollern' out of the sonnets of the Swan. 'Another Temple Gone' is a poem in prose upon a certain illicit and ambrosial whisky. Some have said that Montague could describe well and satirise

well, but could not present real persons; but this cannot be true. Some of the characters in the novels may seem to be embodiments of ideas, or otherwise unpersuasive; but Farrell, the distiller, and Toomey, and many others, are figures quite real for the purposes of art. The same gift will be found in Montague's later gathering of stories, entitled *Action*. The next letter alludes to the whisky story; Montague's correspondent had told him of a similar experience.

To Arthur Rogers

Feb. 20, 1923

It's a great reassurance when I hear anything like that from anyone who knows what's what, and I am sure you do. I fancy all the first-class miracles are really going on, all the time, and that there are other places to be found, like yours in the Midlands, where the real ambrosia wondrously survives. Mine I found in the sideboard of a belovable priest near Meelin, the County Cork, long ago, and the thoughts that I had as I drove away for five miles across country in the dark afterwards, would have knocked those of Amiel, Marcus Aurelius, Pascal and all the old masters into cocked hats.

IV

To Arthur Rogers

Jan. 22, 1923

I can't remember what happened in the *M.G.* in the matter of [a notorious book]—whether it did not come to us for review or whether the insanitary condition of its latrines was thought enough to bar it. After having been anti-Puritanical all my life I feel that some of the recent books give me Puritanical hankerings for the

use of some sort of chloride of lime. The super-pure or sexless people who write 'outspoken' stuff, without any idea that it will be widely bought, as a mere aphrodisiac, by ordinary people with appetite and curiosity, repel me most, I think.

To H. W. Nevinson

March 1, 1923

It fairly made me jump with joy to get your letter [on *Fiery Particles*]. Do tell me again, if any later book of mine seems to you to be any good—I mean any shot at fiction, for I always feel I am clean outside the shop where the real novelists work, and don't know their dodges, and fear they may laugh if they see my struggles with technical things that seem to them quite simple.

A similar burst of self-depreciation may follow here, out of its order. As before, the remarks about his narrow reading must be well discounted.

To H. E. Scott

March 9, 1924

You are a real brick, to take to my little book [*The Right Place*] so kindly. But don't ever go for to make such a mistake as to think that I know a lot about anything. I successfully dodged all attempts to educate me in early life, having a better use for my time than to read books or listen to people lecturing. The result is that the few little bits of things I ever *have* read, or have heard the wise people utter, have always seemed enormously interesting to me and have stuck in my mind so that I keep quoting them when I write anything. But don't imagine that there's anything more left behind, or that the little show I make is a sort of extract from a large

stock in reserve. Every blessed thing I have goes into the shop window every time.

The only thing I really have to write about is one that I guess I share with you, and that's a habit, or trick, or whatever it is, of enjoying most things enormously. It's such a lark all the time, just looking round, that it makes me wonder sometimes whether there isn't a beast of a bad time coming, sooner or later, to even things up. And yet I fancy it *may* go on being all right, all the way through.

To a later correspondent, who had noted a misquotation, he writes likewise:

To Frank Hall

March 10, 1926

I have an evil old habit of quoting things I have never read, but only heard sung, and it has let me down often. Each time I try to console myself with thinking that Shakespeare and Bacon always quoted things wrong, but I know it's no excuse, really. If there is any later edition of *R.J.* [*Rough Justice*], I will get the line, like my bad German, put right.

To F. F. Montague

April 13, 1923

I really think no one can ever have read so few books as I. It's my constant experience to find people conversationally assuming that I have read at least some one page of Gibbon, Hume, Peacock, Landor, Coleridge, Southey, Montaigne, Pascal, Corneille, Racine, Goethe, Dante [here follow two lesser living writers], and so forth, and then making desperate efforts not to show impolite astonishment at my having never opened them. How *do* people read so much? Most of my reading consists of what I heard F. [F. C. M.] quote during our

youth. All those little snippets and gobbets of quotation tickled me so much at the time that they always come into my head now when I attempt the homely, slighted writer's trade (quotation); and I see from reviews of my output that on some innocent minds I actually make the impression of a well-read person, whereas anything I quote from a celebrated author is usually the whole mass of my reading of him, or of what I have heard some more-lettered person quote from him. 'C'est un drôle métier, celui d'amuser les honnêtes gens' (quotation, second-hand, from Molière I'm told). F., apart from other singular virtues, is almost the only widely-read man I know in whom the faculty of quotation has not been destroyed by a surfeit of quotable matter.

Re Normans and such—*Is* there a Norman, any more than, T. Hardy *judice*, there is a Hodge? And if there ever were any, are they likely to have been exceptions to the general rule that all races are accused of vast atrocities by their enemies and that all races commit *some* atrocities when seriously vexed? . . .

I expect the wise liberality of the English, in allowing the Irish, Scots, and others to build an empire for them, is partly due to their own happiness in being repeatedly overrun, conquered, and married into, so that the ultimate Englishman is a useful blend of Brython, Angle, Celt, Roman, Dane, and, in recent times, if he be a peer, American. Anything but in-breeding. All the best English writers, nearly, are semi-Irish, and all the great Irish leaders semi-English, semi-Welsh, or semi-Portuguese (or is De Valera semi-Spanish?). Old Wilfrid Scawen Blunt could never get a winner among his pure-bred Arabs; but has not every winner on the turf got a drop of Arab blood from some remote common ancestor—was it Beeswing or another?—as you and I, I fondly hope, got an English drop from some

adventurous hanger-on of some insolent invader of Ireland.

To F. F. Montague

Feb. 16, 1923

If you've had time, I expect you'll have a fine lot of counts this time against the Irishry of my invention, or rather recollection, and most of them valid, but not the one about 'me' as a phonetic spelling of the Irish utterance of 'my'. In the faith that this is accurate I am prepared to die at the stake, if the fire is not too hot. I have tried writing it 'my' in an Irish character's speech, because every avoidable departure from ordinary spelling is to be avoided, but every time it seemed to spread a patch of non-veracity all round it. I say 'me' for 'my' myself as often as not, and, though Thackeray's Irish speeches are only a little less crude than Shakespeare's, I give him not out for the Fotheringay's 'me child', and I fancy it must have been the abundance of good Irish and semi-Irish actresses on the English stage that established 'me child' as the regular thing in British popular melodrama. I don't remember Lever's spelling very well, but the only one that ever has struck me as signally good is Shaw's in *John Bull's Other Island*, where the differentiation between the native Irishman's speech and that of the consciously posing Irishman campaigning in England seems to be all that there is of finesse in observation. But then he is an absolutely demonic hand, or ear, at phonetics, as his Cockneys, Scots, and Amur'cans also show.

To F. C. Montague

Aug. 17, 1923

My heart leapt up when I beheld both your handwriting and the Zermatt post-mark on one post-card.

'And I not there! and I not there!'—I think this refrain to one of the *Ionica* poems [by William Cory] more rending than ever in August if it be then fine in the Alps. Not that I should complain now, for M. and I had a fine month at midsummer in the eastern part of the Mont Blanc group—Champex, etc. It was our first Swiss climbing since the devastatory 1914, and we fairly wallowed in it.

As the next letters show, and the next book, the joy of life was strong in Montague at fifty-six, in spite of the war, of 'disenchantment', and of routine.

To Francis Dodd

Nov. 14, 1923

I am a dog, not to have written sooner, but I've been leading a dog's life, working all hours at a book [*The Right Place*] which I contracted to finish by the end of November. Never a contract again. Base is the slave who contracts. But I can see just a bead of light at the far end of the tunnel now. The worst of it is, it's a book I really wanted to write properly, coaxing the expression of everything up to a decent pitch of clear vividness, and now God help the scamped, flustered stuff. It's really all about a sentence in your letter—'the world is all so v. v. big and it's all so enchantingly lovely'. All my life I seem to have been suppressing, through damned politeness or funk or something, the fact that I'm secretly shivering and grinning with delight at things by which all the authoritative people seem to be bored. I've tried real hard, in my time, to suffer from tedium and disgust, like the best people. You remember how Walter Pater says, 'the way to perfection is through a series of disgusts'; but divvil a disgust can I raise, except perhaps at some pretentious written or painted

work; and this is what I was minded to make a clean breast of, in a decentish book, which this one ain't going to be.

To Francis Dodd *Dec.* 22, 1923

We're both really sorry about your rheumatics. It's a poor thing not to be able to get about, and the world looking so fine—finer every year and more of it. There's some downright bad adjustment about the length of the life of *homo sapiens* in relation to the amount of tiptop stuff provided for his enjoyment. I, for one, have only just begun to get anything like the full enjoyment of the pilgrimage, and I doubt if I've got more than 43 more years to live [at *aet.* 57]. . . . Not a square deal at all, Mister, not a square deal at all.

It was not; but he was still to have four years and a half, not less happy and active; and for nearly three of these he was to be at liberty.

Party politics seldom figure in Montague's letters, but in 1924–5 he writes to his brother in Fiji:

To Dr. Aubrey Montague *Jan.* 26, 1924

Isn't it enormously interesting to see how the new [Labour] Government does? Of course there *must* be lots of difficulty in coming down, from the free and airy job of always opposing, to the collar work of having to do things and face the consequences. But there's a sort of aghastness evident among Conservative people here at the presentableness of the new Cabinet—a sort of fear that it may possibly carry on surprisingly well and take the fancy of the country, especially as there is an adverse majority in the Commons to save it from doing the things that might scare the electors.

To Dr. Aubrey Montague

Dec. 26, 1924

I don't seem to see a simply Liberal Ministry ever in power again. That this should *seem* so must in fact help to ensure its *being* so, for it means that all the bright young 'arrivistes' who want to be in Ministries will go elsewhere. I don't much dread the prospect of being one of a party of mere critics and balance-turners in politics, especially now that the reactions, as they say, of the war, have dragged the Conservative party into being something like the Liberals of our youth—did you read Baldwin's speech the other day, about having to 'force a way' through the 'jungle of interests' that obstructed any improvement of slum housing?

To Dr. Aubrey Montague

Nov. 1 [1925?]

Baldwin has pulled it off pretty well this week, hasn't he? He seems to me to be, personally, a first-rate man who more than deserves any success he gets and won't let anyone down meanly. I think the Liberals need the full four years of impotence, now beginning, to purge the measly ways they have been getting into ever since that utterly spoiling and debilitating 'record' victory in 1906. As I see it, they lost then the habit of keeping fit and acting together, as a party, and the Asquith-George rivalry, since 1915, finished it.

V

The collection of essays called *The Right Place* (1924) shows a rebound from the mood of *Disenchantment*. In acknowledging a letter of praise from an un-

known reader, Montague calls it, justly, 'the happiest of my books; for its material was gathered at the happiest times of my life, and I took great pleasure in trying to communicate to its readers the feel of those good times'. *The Right Place*, to my mind, is not only happy all through but good all through, and likely to be as stable as anything he wrote. It breathes the volatile essence of many holidays in which public and private cares are elastically thrown aside. There are no vexed questions, political or other. Most of it is wrought up from articles contributed to the *Manchester Guardian*. The writing, as ever, is carefully studied and burnished, yet it is unforced, and of an excellent and varying cadence. As a sworn Londoner, I would pick out as an illustration this ample sentence; there are others just as good upon the Swiss or English[1] countryside.

Fleet Street when the lamps are being lit on a clear evening; Southwark, its ramshackle wharves and mud foreshore, seen from Waterloo Bridge at five o'clock on a sunny June morning, the eighteenth century bank of the river looking across to its nineteenth century bank; the Temple's enclaves of peace where the roar of the Strand comes so softened, you hear the lowest chirp of a sparrow, twenty yards away, planted clear and edgy, a little foreground figure, on that dim background of sound; the liberal arc of a mighty circle of buildings massed above the Embankment, drawn upon the darkness in dotted lines of light, as a night train brings you in to Charing Cross; the long line of big

[1] He was much inspired by H. J. Mackinder's *Britain and the British Seas* (1902), and wrote an eloquent review of it (*M.G.*, Feb. 7, 1902), which might well be reprinted

ships dropping noiselessly down the silent river, past Greenwich and Grays, on the ebb of a midnight high tide—O, there are endless courses to this feast.

Part of the pleasure of a holiday for Montague was to think out every detail beforehand and to put in careful staff work at home accordingly. The thing must be mapped out like a battle, and his love of maps is well known.

Few Irishmen have expressed at all, and in prose few Englishmen so well, the passion for the face of England—black England as well as green England. Montague's turn for 'topographical portraiture', and his trained eye for the bones of a landscape, its ranges, plains, and 'intercostal hollows', are here at work. 'Along an English Road' is full of such observation, not loose or merely 'impressionistic'; the essays themselves seem to have a hard solid subsoil. He liked to take a long journey on foot or wheels, and to harmonise his mental notes of the scenery he passed through, with its colours, history, and structure; as though he were at rest, and all were passing before him as on a film. Once, in 1904, he had started at night from the office and bicycled through to London,[1] halting little, and arriving the next evening in good repair. The hardest pull, he said, was after the midday pause, but soon he got going again.

One of the chapters, 'Another Way', is based on a *Guardian* article called 'Aromatists', a word that is used in the chapter itself and is, I suppose, one of Montague's pleasing coinages. The aromatist is the person, the aesthetic amateur, who lives entirely on beautiful and

[1] He describes such a journey in an unreprinted paper signed 'C.', *M.G.*, March 3, 1923: 'A Good Look at England'.

choice sensations; like the dog who rolls in ecstasy over anything that smells good, he chases round Italy in search of them, such 'moments', and of pictures or statues or places that afford them. He lives, more or less, according to the gospel falsely imputed to Walter Pater, forgetting work and his plain duties, 'rich enough not to bother, cultivated up to the nines'. Such persons must exist, to have caused Montague so much—not merely whimsical—annoyance; or are they creatures of satire? In any case, his conception of them is made clear in a letter to a stranger who had sent him an essay 'in defence of aromatism'. The writer, an admirer of Montague's works, had made out a humorous case for the pleasures of listening to a gramophone in leisure hours; he had spent a busy life in Sheffield in the service of education.

To the Rev. V. W. Pearson

March 24, 1924

My dear Sir — I have much enjoyed your paper, which finds me a prisoner in bed with influenza, and therefore strongly inclined to malevolence, but still quite unable to quarrel with anything you say.

No one who has done your tale of work can ever be an aromatist in my evil sense. The creature, as I see him, is a being who has lost perspective and proportion and imagines aesthetic self-culture to be enough to fill the *whole* of his life, instead of making it, as you do, the interest of your leisure. With the aromatist I would contrast *not* the man or woman who is insensible to the joys of art, historic atmosphere, etc., but those who feast on these, with a will, in a certain measure of their time, for which they are released, like you or me in holidays, from some drastic labour like teaching the

young or helping to produce a newspaper. All, it seems to me, is a question of balance and of the wise distribution of our energies between the absorption of beauty and the labour of getting things done, so far as these two are mutually exclusive.

In a book that I have just published I have tried to work this distinction out, embodying parts of the article you refer to and of another on the holiday joys of the hard-worked.

All possible benedictions on your gramophone. Believe me, Yours very faithfully.

A good comment on this book and on the nature of Montague's love for England is to be found in another letter. Mr. Tomlinson explains its occasion; it came, he says,

in reply to one of mine, telling him of my return from the East, in which I had confessed to C. E. M. my surprise when I found that I had no desire, as aforetime, to go on deck, when the word came that our ship had lifted the English landfall. It was an after-the-war feeling. It was November 1923.

To H. M. Tomlinson

Hail and avaunt! I mean hail to you as the most human-hearted of persons, the best of reviewers, and the only person, except me, who sufficiently loves the Thames. And avaunt you as one momentarily so perverted as to expect your affections to be reasonable and disown them, or think you *can* disown them, merely because the beloved object is rather a bad lot, or otherwise unworthy.

I don't give a hang for all the sound intellectual reasons for devotion to a country—pride in its greatness

or its blasted 'rough island story', or the pedigree of its kings. I would as soon love it for its imports of jute. As far as I can tell, my own regard for England is almost wholly sensuous, or at any rate broad-based on something sensuous. My England is the Strand and Waterloo Bridge and all the Thames and the Pennine Hills here, and the crowd at a League football match, and Midland farmers talking like Shallow and Silence about the price of beasts, and the look of the common soldier in France at anything new, and the special *kind* of good-temper and humour and relenting decency that the man of the working classes has here. It's always something visible or audible or tactible, and there's not a scrap of a sound intellectual reason why I should feel any affection for it, any more than there is why most of us should be loved by our wives. In fact it *is* love and not judgment or wise criticism, which are much inferior affairs.

A lot of our fellow Liberals—I don't mean you—seem to me rather to doom themselves to futility in public affairs because they won't recognise that there's a zone of natural affection[1] midway between the inner, or family, one, and the outer, or all-humanity one. I suppose they are somehow short of a zone themselves and they seem to get vexed because the common man won't just regard England as one of a lot of squabbling countries between whom he has to do intellectual justice impartially. The common man knows better, just as he'd know better if some philosopher told him he ought not to make invidious distinctions by feeding his own children in preference to others. But of course he can't explain; he just says 'Well, you're a rum perisher' and goes on feeding the kids.

You're not like that philosopher. So I think you were just a bit orf of it at the moment of your return

[1] For this idea see above, p. 171.

to the native strand, and that the authentic irrational affection for England—not the prime cuts of her only, but the delectable boiling pieces and the endearing offal too—has been coming on uncommon strong ever since.

I'm writing a book designed partly to combat such treasons to love as you pretend to have committed off Portland. Up the senses. Down with Reason. À la lanterne la Justice.

God bless you, whenever I've lived among common men I've been much the commonest among them. It's the well-educated, with their appalling omnisciences and contempt that I can't get into any sort of comfortable touch with. They find out at once that I've not read any Balzac or Sainte-Beuve or Coleridge or Bergson or somebody and I have to sneak out.

Just off for a week's holiday in the Chilterns.

The last verses of the following poem seem to connect themselves with the mood of *The Right Place*, as well as with one of passing—perhaps merely dramatic—despondency.

THE MAN WHO FAILED

What could I not have done?
I that spilt on the sand
The cup of my youth;

I that had all the keys—
Ears that drew whispers from Earth
As she turned in her sleep;

Eyes that could make anything
Come as wondrously into their ken
As a new star,

And the will to admire, and the strength
To have the breath taken away
With awe and delight.

Oh the eyes and the ears I have dulled
And the lowliness lost, and the portions
Of death I have died!

Another letter shows how even after one of his rare illnesses he was 'willing to let the world off'.

To Arthur Rogers

April 8, 1924

I am very sorry not to have written sooner, but I have been knocked over by influenza and have had the unusual experience of lying in bed and not being allowed to do anything. It was cheering to get your letter during this evil time, when it seemed as if all my little books must be seeming as dull to everybody else as everything seemed to me. By Jove, how malevolent influenza can make you! I am getting fit now and feeling quite willing to let the world off—am much delighted, too, at the success of A. N. Monkhouse's new play [*The Conquering Hero*] in London. People seem at last to be coming to understand the delicate and gentle beauty of his work, after passing him by for 30 years.

A correspondent in New York, a close student of Montague's text, had inquired concerning some of his habits of spelling and typography. How, for instance, should compound words be printed: separately, or with a hyphen, or as a single word? Every writer is faced with this minute problem. Here is part of Montague's long reply, which shows both his care in such matters, and his opinion of lexicographers (with which they

would probably agree). The instances are taken from *The Right Place* (I omit most of the page-references).

To Louis N. Feipel

Oct. 27, 1924

I am very sorry not to have answered your kind letter of August 20, but I have had hardly any time to spare from pressing work, and did not like to answer you hurriedly. Even now I have only dealt with a part of the questions you raise. . . .

Apparent orthographic inconsistencies.—In the matter of the prefixed 're-' I fear my practice is rather capricious, but my general idea[1] is that where a verb thus formed is thoroughly established in the language (*e.g.* 'reintroduce', there should be no hyphen after the 're-', and that the hyphen should be used when a writer is using the licence he has to make verbs of this kind, *e.g.* 're-plunge'.

I have a corresponding feeling about the compound nouns and verbs in your list, for instance, 'mail-cart', 'cornland', 'fairy-tale', and 'fairy story'. I feel that such compounds begin as quite separate pairs of words—that, *e.g.* the words 'mountain landscape' should at present be wholly separate; that a long period of habitual conjunction makes it natural to hyphenate them, and a still longer period to write them as one word. Thus I feel that 'mountain range' should be two words (as on p. 48, top), and that 'mountain-range' (p. 48, bottom) is a bad slip of mine or my printers; that 'fairy story', being less deeply imbedded in the language, should be thus spelt, but that 'fairy-tale' has reached a stage of fixity which calls for the hyphen; that 'grass land' is still at the first stage, but that 'marshland' and 'cornland' have so long been settled in literature that they

[1] Quite orthodox so far; see *Concise Oxford Dictionary. s.v.* 're-'.

are now almost as completely fused into a single word as the two words 'nose' and 'thirl' in 'nostril'. I have the same general principle at the back of my mind in dealing with such compounds as 'half-lit', 'half interred' 'well amused', and 'well-taught'.

But my practice is very far from being a systematic application of the principle. I must confess I feel rather contumacious towards even the best dictionaries when they lay down general rules on points at which the practice of first-rate writers varies. Nothing in language is immutably fixed: the best writers are constantly changing it. Absolute government by dictionary would mean the arrest of this healthy process of change and growth. Lexicographers, I feel, are useful as registrars of the past proceedings of writers, but seem to me to have no authority comparable with that which such a writer as Hardy or Anatole France exercises at his discretion. The fact, for example, that Hardy often uses 'split infinitives' destroys, to my mind, the force of the common rigid condemnation of split infinitives as 'bad English'. I avoid them myself, but I can't feel that Hardy is a blunderer.

VI

The next year was saddened by the death of Mr. Frederick Montague, on October 30, 1925; to his memory *Rough Justice* is dedicated. I have quoted from many letters from Charles to this brother, out of about a hundred that have been preserved, and have noted their perennial habit of carrying on a smart argument through the post. These letters also show great affection; and Charles, who much disliked spoken debating, much more the remotest hint of an altercation, lets fly with Frederick, as in a friendly game of fives. Mean-

while, during this year, he made up his mind that the time had come for him to drop journalism. He had been at it, except for the years of war, since 1890; and his letters, sufficiently and more than once, explain his reasons for the step.

To F. C. Montague

June 13, 1925

Behold me following your wise example in retiring from the daily round of fixed-hour professional toil while still young and skittish enough to kick up our heels in the meadows to some purpose. I have just resigned my place on the *M.G.*—not through the slightest disagreement of any sort with anybody, or diminution of affection for the paper and everyone about it, but just through the feeling that the golden moment for closing a happy chapter, and trying to start another, has about arrived.

To Allan Monkhouse

July 4, 1925

I should not like you to hear casually from anyone else—it's under seal for the present—that I give up my work on the *M.G.* at the end of this year and retire to some cot under an elm, if it can be found. Not the slightest disagreement with anyone at the office, nor quarrel with any of the paper's views, nor anything frictious or fractious of any sort, but just a feeling that a chapter has worked round, all right, to a natural close. Much of my office work has become, in a sense, too easy. . . . I shall try to write books all the time—anyhow no journalism anywhere else—no battening on moors after leaving to feed on our dear old mountain.

Very bad for one, these changes in prospect. One grows more egotistic and sentimental than ever, at once. Just look at this letter—as if I had all the cares and you none!

To Francis Dodd

July 26, 1925

Bless you for understanding all about it. Half the people I know are congratulating me on the assumption that I'm going to sit about in the sun and do nothing—evening of life, etc.! I'm as fit as can be, but damnably in danger of getting to do my easy, pleasant, profitable work on the *M.G.* as a sort of luxurious habit instead of finding each bit of work a desperate hazard that has to be struggled with till it's downed. So it was clearly a case for closing the chapter and starting in on a new one while we both have a good kick left in us. . . We are trying to find a cottage on some bit of highish ground within reach of the Thames or Isis or one of its tributaries; so if you should hear of anything cheap and not foul to look at, please remember us.

To H. W. Nevinson

July 27, 1925

Shall I confess—writing in my beloved *M.G.* had become, in a way, too habitual—too much in danger of becoming easy, in the rotten sense, and too little of the arduous hazard that the start of every article one writes has got to be, if it's to be worth doing. Isn't there a lot in old Pater's notion that 'failure in life is to form habits'? When you feel some sort of work 'at your fingers' ends', as they say, so that you achieve an outer semblance of having done it without having had your innards really wrung in order to effect this, it seems to be about time for a change to something a little tougher.

You won't mistake this for the beastly conceit of thinking that I can do leading articles well. It's only that the proper agony and bloody sweat (and the delight they bring the agonist) of trying to do 'em better each time don't come on quite as they used to. So it seemed best to shift while there's still a good kick left in both of us. Of course I have not the faintest difference of any sort with the paper or anybody on it—least of all with C. P. Scott, who is a very prince of men. As to the office here, and this dear city, I really don't know how the parting is to be brought off.

There's fine egoism for you. One of the few good things about our going from here is that you and a few other people will, we hope, be more within reach. Ever yours.

A Sheffield correspondent, a stranger, scanning *The Right Place* too rapidly, had caught the words 'Who so base as live in Sheffield?' which are put dramatically into the mouth of Southern dwellers at 'play' in country houses. Taking them for the moment as Montague's own, he sent him verses 'setting forth Sheffield's claims to better respect', and afterwards saw the irony of the sentence. He got the following 'utterly disarming' reply.

My dear Sir—Thank you kindly for your letter and verses, with every line of which I am most heartily in sympathy. I should indeed have deserved to be chastised with all the whips and scorpions of satire if I had sneered at Sheffield or Manchester. I can never be grateful enough that my fortunes brought me from the Thames valley, when I was 23, to live in Manchester for the last 35 years. I am to leave this dear city and its people, at the end of this year, and it feels like a death in the family, though I have had to decide on it.

I know Sheffield well, as well as its glorious surroundings, and nobody need wish for a finer and more honourable place to live in.

Believe me, in fullest sympathy, yours very sincerely.

VII

On December 24, 1925, he did his last day's work on the *Manchester Guardian*. On December 19 the farewell dinner had been held at the Reform Club in Manchester. Every department of the staff was represented, old colleagues came from London, and Mr. Scott, who presided, proposed the guest. Some expressive sentences may be borrowed from the press report. After speaking of the affection in which Montague was held, he said that

they wanted to thank him for all he was, and all he had done, for his high temper, his political courage, the unswerving stand he had ever made for liberty, his deep and critical understanding of literature, the drama, and the fine arts, for the crystal clearness of his style, and its wonderful vigour and vividness, for the model he had set before them of English pure and undefiled.

The speaker dwelt on Montague's first days in Manchester, on his comradeship, his soldiership, and his sportsmanship and love of cricket[1] and football. 'Everything he wrote bore his signature all over', though it were professedly anonymous; yet of even the most distinctive writer it was true that

Only in his books did he become completely himself. Montague had lived both lives, the life of the journalist

[1] 'He used to try to hit nearly every ball for six,' says one of his friends in an obituary note. He was president of the Manchester Press Cricket Club.

and the life of the author—he had lived them hard, and he had lived them together.

The paper of the day might die with the day, but its work, if well done, as Montague had done it, did not die; it entered into the life of the nation and helped to direct its mind and shape its destiny.

These festal speeches have a very genuine ring; they are fervent but well within the mark, and are free from 'hot air'. Mr. Nevinson testified, in his eloquent way, and one of his *mots* has gone the round: 'We had often heard of men whose dark hair has gone white through fear, but Montague was the only man whose white hair turned dark through courage'. The spokesman of the composing-room, Mr. Wailes, must have pleased Montague by saying that 'any trade union would gladly have made him an honorary member', on account of the 'human touch' in his writing upon labour matters. The guest, after being musically toasted, had to reply, no doubt with more than his usual shiver at a public appearance. 'I simply have', he once wrote, 'to mug up any speech beforehand, lest the pump run absolutely dry in the hour of need.' As this seems to be his one reported oration, part of it ought to figure here, even in the somewhat dispiriting third-person style:

He could tell them now, with the freedom of one who was making his last speech from the cart (as people used to say), that till the big wrench came quite near they would not even guess how big a wrench it was, nor how it made him feel that anything else he might do with the remainder of his time could hardly be more than a postscript to the long letter he had written during his work for the paper.

So long a stay as his seemed like a 'kind of lifetime complete in all its stages':

a childhood quite like an ordinary childhood in being wonderfully and delightfully free from all responsibility or care beyond the job of the moment; then a kind of early middle age, in which one began to suspect that the camp of youth was a place which he might not always have the run of; and finally a state of seniority which it was now almost impossible to dispute when the former baby of the office found that, long before he had outlived his own first sense of comfortable insignificance, other and yet other babies had come to take their innings in the cradle, and perhaps looked to him for assistance which he had in no way qualified himself to give.

He then paid his tribute to the high technical training given on the paper, and to departed masters of the craft like Arnold and Robert Spencer. But for a memoir, the most distinctive passage is that in which Montague told of his distaste for editing and tutoring younger colleagues, and explained his abstinence from doing so by a kind of confession of faith. The younger colleagues, as we have seen, had been very far from finding him as he suggests, 'grimly unhelpful'. But he cherished their independence:

To one who was—perhaps fanatically—Liberal by instinct, all the personal home rule of a friend, his whole mental and moral autonomy, must be a thing to guard and respect like one's own. What mattered most of all was that each should do, not what, on the whole, might be the best thing for most men to do in a similar case, but the best thing that he, being just what he was,

could do on an authentic impulse of his own and as a genuine expression of himself.

He did not himself like to accept anything 'simply on the word of some authoritative person'; and, accordingly, he felt some 'pricking of his thumbs' whenever he was forced to offer good advice. Montague, no doubt soundly, calls this the principle of Liberalism; but the term is hardly big enough, for we can see that the artist is speaking too, speaking for the freedom of art. The rest of his reply touches on his regard for his editor and on his own harmonious personal relations with all concerned. I think no excuse is needed for rescuing so much of this report. Montague, after his resignation, remained a director of the *Manchester Guardian*, and made regular visits to the city.

VIII

Before leaving it he wrote the following letter, which can be read with two later ones of 1927. These, though out of chronological order, may as well be given next. He had always tried to watch, in himself and others, the inner procedure of the artist at work, and the nature of 'creative excitement'. Former letters have shown how he thought the root of the matter to lie in a certain 'intoxication', or ecstasy. He wanted to get nearer to the reason of the thing, and had welcomed, in an appreciative notice, the lucid speculations of Professor Alexander on 'Art and the Material'. The word, 'magnoperate' is a favourite usage, I suppose a coinage, of Montague's, for an artist doing very big things.

To Samuel Alexander

Guardian Office, *Sept.* 21, 1925

It's I who ought to have thanked *you* for the paper[1] on the way the artists magnoperate.[2] It fairly delighted me to see the thing put right at last. Of course Goldsmith is a specially good case, but anybody ought to understand it who has had the common experience of meeting a famous author or artist (when he is not excited above himself by functioning in his art) and feeling let down by his relative dulness in talk. Was it Johnson who called some great actress an 'inspired idiot', for the same reason? I fancy every writer, when he reads something that he wrote with the proper excitement on him, thinks 'How the devil did I ever do anything so good as that?'—didn't Thackeray say something of the sort, afterwards, when he read his scene between Lord Steyne, Becky, and Rawdon?

To Samuel Alexander

Kitt's Quarries, *July* 7, 1927

Thank you first, and very kindly, for the honorific use[3] of my reminiscences of an idler's fumblings at Greats. It's the most honoured of cheap deal pegs for the very best of hats.

It's cheek of me to say it, but you seem to me enormously right, all through. On p. 315, in particular,

[1] C. E. M.'s notice was in *M.G.*, Sept. 8, 1925.

[2] Montague indulges in some other agreeable words which may or may not become current: *futilitarian, fantasticating, lassitudinous.*

[3] A passage from *Rough Justice* (ch. xii. pp. 154-5: 'No doubt philosophy . . . completing itself') is taken as a text to Prof. Alexander's paper on 'The Creative Process in the Artist's Mind,' in the *British Journal of Psychology*, April 1927 (vol. xvii. pp. 303-21).

every sentence is supported by what I have noticed when watching artists at work. Muirhead Bone and Francis Dodd are the two I have seen most. In both the rising excitement was obvious, and I was pretty certain that this excitement and delight varied in direct proportion to the quality the man was putting into his work at the time—and he was exhausted afterwards in the same proportion.

Some sort of analogy between the creative excitement in art and the mental exaltation attending the begettal of children can't help suggesting itself, and I have sometimes thought the sexual exaltation may be the nearest the common man ever comes to the sort of ecstasy in which a line like

> And visited all night by troops of stars

is written. But there's such a plague of sloppy talk about everything's relation to sex that one rather wants to think there may be nothing in it.

It's splendid that you write about these things. I've always been simply bewildered by Hegel's treatment of fine art and by Bosanquet's treatment of Hegel's. They seem to know everything except the one extraordinary thing that befalls the first-rate artist when he is functioning well. It's strange, for, as you say, we all experience it in our degree, and might suspect that the tiptop artist is differentiated from others by his supernormal power of being excited into something far above his ordinary form, and this very quickly, in response to the stimulus of physical contact with his paints or clay.

To Samuel Alexander

July 30, 1927

Behold a fortnight in which I have not thanked you for *Art and Instinct*.[1] But I have read it three or four

[1] The Herbert Spencer lecture given at Oxford in 1927.

times, with intervals—the only way in which I can read anything serious—and it seems to me to get about a mile nearer than anything else I have read to the centre of the central mystery—I mean to the value and power of 'Beauty falls from the air' or 'Was this the face that [launched a thousand ships]', etc. Pp. 19 and 20 specially satisfy and rejoice me—all the part about the *homo additus naturae* aspect of art.

I can't make out whether the reason why pictures of the extreme non-representative school leave me so cold is that I have some sort of blindness to the higher values of colour and line, or that the painters of them have never had the authentic excitement from which great art arises and that they are really only disputants and illustrators of a doctrine. I suppose one might say that Turner's 'Petworth', or his '"Sun of Venice" going to Sea', is scarcely representative at all; but in neither case do I feel any sense of the presence of extraordinary beauty, or of a great stir in my own mind. [?All is] qualified by the feeling 'How controversial this is!' which I get from some of the work which Fry most admires—evidently with great sincerity.

Thank you very much. Do write the first great English book about the philosophy of art—the complementary book to Reynolds's *Discourses*, which seems to have in it all that the painters have to say about their job—explicitly, all that was going, up to Reynolds's time, and implicitly all that they have said since. But *que sçais-je?*

IX

The Montagues were settled in their new home, Kitt's Quarries, Burford, by Christmas 1925.

To Francis Dodd

Nov. 14, 1925

We are burning to show you both our cottage, and eager to get it fit to bring friends to. It was built by Wren's former mason, Kempster, to live in while superintending the quarrying of stone, close by, for some of the less important parts of St. Paul's, and it was going to wreck, as a small farmhouse, when it was bought a few years ago by E. J. Horniman. . . . [Some alterations described.] We are much in love with the place and have wild dreams of making a formal garden, of a sort, on the site of the old farmyard. The original front is real beautiful in my sight, and the barn (equal in size to all the rest of the house) is a sovereign prince of barns. But you must see.

Christopher Kempster's house, built about 1698, half a mile from Burford, and 'near the top of the down, near the Oxford and Cheltenham Road', lies on the south-eastern foothills of the Cotswolds, up above the southern bank of the looped and twisting Windrush. Montague does not describe in print this countryside; but for him it was 'the right place'. The old quarries, humped and grass-covered, were at the door; the uplands were in sight beyond, with what William Morris calls their 'moveless waves'; Burford, one of the fairest and least invaded of old Midland towns, lay below; Oxford, where several of the children were at school or college, was within a drive; and there was quiet for work. To work Montague went, much inspirited and recruited by the change. He had two years and half more to live, spent in this good place. I had seen him now and then since the war, casually; once, for a

moment, in the 'orchestral Strand'. He was well, but he had the look, not to be mistaken, of those who have been, as people say, put through it, and who watch what is before them with other scenes in mind: the look that we hope not to see on future faces. No one who really saw that war could be the same afterwards. His later books reflect, of course, this great and bitter experience; but they also, in *The Right Place* and elsewhere, reflect the natural man, with his gay curiosity and resilience. And this was the man, no doubt somewhat subdued, whom he showed to the world, although those nearest to him might also be aware of the change. He did not live to show how far his native temper might prevail; but it was re-asserting itself, though with a difference; and his powers, at any rate, were greater than ever. The move to the country and the release from the office desk were all to the good. Some of his letters, and a note on his writings, must fill the record of this almost eventless period.

He had once again to face the public, though not to address it. On Nov. 17, 1926, he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Manchester, and listened to the words of the presenter, his friend Professor Alexander. For their felicity, they are given here.

I present to you a man of letters who has illustrated the practice of journalism by resources of scholarship which would have adorned a chair of literature. His immense natural gusto and zest of living hard, and his passion for the intenser ways of life, like mountaineering or the theatre or rock-climbing, led him at the outset of the war to conceal from the authorities his already

whitening hairs and fling himself, with all the ardour and more than the gravity of youth and reinforced by his ancestral shillelagh, into that great emprise—with what effect of disillusionment from what high hope he has himself recorded in a moving and fiery book upon its conduct. They have made him a writer of 'middles' and dramatic criticisms in which the ephemeral became not only delightful but permanent. They are reflected in the pungency and brevity and directness of his phrases, in his humorous scorn and rage at pretence and half-heartedness of all kinds, as well as in the delicate observation which catches every mood of his beloved Thames or of the Alpine weather at dawn. Nor is it mere parochialism if we take pride that these gifts have been used for so many years in the service of the great newspaper of this city and in his personal connection with its admired Editor.

To Percy Withers

BURFORD, *March* 26, 1926

Thank you most warmly. My book is so far out of the fashion—so far as I apprehend this—of novel-writing in these times that praise like yours is immensely reassuring and inspiriting. I, too, hardly ever read a new novel, but I gather the reigning convention is that novelists are never to betray any preference for fine people above base ones and that no young reader is ever to be able to gather from a novel that nobility is a more interesting thing than shabbiness. One hears the more imitative sort of young people talking this kind of inverted priggishness, and it bores me as much as the earlier priggishness that devastated some of the secondary Victorians. I suppose the new affectation of amoralism is made possible by the enormous secureness of many well-to-do people's lives. They are so infinitely

far from any serious likelihood of being even robbed that they can play with the notion that burglars may be quite charming characters, whereas a Tartuffe might be an only too confounded reality for Molière. But I mustn't maunder on about theory.

To Francis Dodd

April 13, 1926

I'll go on writing books, and *not* give my whole time to the garden, if you'll write me a letter about each of them. You're demonically right about my pleasant youth's want of natural growth. Of course I want him to be seen as stunted mentally by rotten education, but still he ought to show the natural changes better. Also my weakling's breakdown ain't really studied or understood—he's merely a shallowly observed case of the common use of words to keep real experience of life at arm's length, instead of using them as a slight aid to oneself in getting right into it. A rum thing is that where I've slackly practised mere literal reproduction of life, as in some of the remarks of the children, I have been slated for unrealism, non-veracity, etc., while my wildest inventions have scraped through without blame. Well, I *must* have another shot, to see what you say.

x

These two letters refer to *Rough Justice*, published early in the year. The reader will be used by this time to Montague's habit of honestly but often unduly 'slating' his own works. It was not 'slackness' at all to put in anecdotes of his own children; they are good ones, and fit in well; and nothing else matters. Some of them had come into his letters to Frederick, the

bachelor brother who liked to hear them. *Rough Justice*, though not his best book, is the most interesting of them all to a biographer; visibly, it is fuller than any other of his own experience. The hero is born in 1892; the tale begins to develop about the year 1903, but the time of the main action is the war. The tidal Thames in its upper reaches, where the drama opens and ends, is presented, like the London and the Oxford streets, with a peculiar delicacy. The Salvation Army chants by the Martyrs' Memorial, as in Balliol days. The Lancashire crowd watching the football talk their own language. 'That', we read, 'was our strength and our hope —the hardihood of the common man's unfastidious gusto.' Then the hero, Auberon Garth, enlists, suffers from sergeant-majors and the hardships of transit, but holds out and goes to the line with his fellows, nearly all of them men of the people. With these scenes, to my mind, the narrative and the persons leap into life. The chief actors in the story, though most affectionately elaborated, tend at last to be embodiments of ideas, rather than persons. The heroine, Molly, after her childhood, is seen through a kind of idealising mist; she and the hero become *patterns* of the breed that is to save old England. Also I find it hard to accept, as it is presented, the dreadful business of the brilliant 'intellectual' who is trapped and seduced by a carnal French peasant woman, caught as a deserter, and shot under the auspices of a specially brutal 'conductor of executions at dawn'. Other figures are in the nature of satiric types—politicians, dons, and society dames—wittily and sketchily derided. But I would rather subtract from Montague's self-criticisms than add to them.

He put much of his best, and of himself, into *Rough Justice*, and it is packed with matter. In the gentler passages he is in full command of his music. In one of them, Auberon is steering a towed boat; and

> The gliding rhythm of small noises as the bank slides past, the mildly resistant lapping of the water under the inshore bow, the little whispering swish that runs along the gunwale now and again when it rubs softly past some jutting tussock of grass and buttercups—all this run of minor melodies helps your own thoughts to trip along fluently.

A reply to another correspondent, a stranger and a public school master, who admired *Rough Justice* and had offered some criticisms, throws light upon the earlier chapters.

To H. S. Vere Hodge

Jan. 22, 1927

I think I agree with every word of [your letter] except your too generous praise. I wouldn't present a Chaytor-Tonge as typical, nor even as a frequent exception. I have only known of one master to be classed with him. Again, most of my own friends are men who have had the usual public school and university education without having their individuality effaced or driven to cover. I do think that the planing tendency goes further than it, ideally, should—in the sense that too many men are led to attach too much importance to rather trivial standards of conduct, etc. But there, again, I would recognise that a great many people are planed up to the average level rather than planed down to it, and also, as you say, that—at any rate in the case of the stouter specimens—planing is only a surface operation.

I think my book may seem more harsh to the system than my own feeling towards it, because it combines with some general reflections on the system the presentation of a few pretty poor specimens of educators. To the general reflections I am inclined to stick, but I do not present the individual guys, like Chaytor-Tonge and the Oxford tuft-hunter, as symbols of their profession or class, any more than Galsworthy presents his Soames Forsyte as an average solicitor. I suppose all that one may ask of a character in a novel or play is that he should be *possible*—doesn't Aristotle say something like this somewhere?—and my excuse for having such cattle as Chaytor-Tonge and Ducat in my book is that nothing in nature or in existing social conditions quite precludes them. But I am getting tedious, which isn't a fair response to your friendly letter. Thank you kindly for it.

XI

One of his occupations during 1926 is described in a letter of the following year, when *Right Off the Map* was published.

To Francis Dodd

Oct. 16, 1927

You're dead right about my story. Only excuse is that it was first written, as a play, with all the incentives to *niaiserie* that this means, about 25 years ago. When I re-wrote it last year I found that a lot of the imbecility that was bred in its bone simply wouldn't come out in my dressing-down of the flesh, and I weakly let it be, like the mother in Solomon's court that couldn't stick the chopping-up of her babe.

Two earlier letters refer to the same book.

To Percy Withers *May* 9, 1927

Would it were worthier of the many good fellows for whom—their mouths having long been full of earth—I felt myself to be more or less speaking. I have just your general feeling about the repulsiveness of writings on the war. And yet here is that hulking, hideous event right in the foreground—or middle distance at most—of millions and millions of the minds among whom the writers of the [now] opening period are to come. It looks as if we poor dogs of readers would have to be returning to our vomit continually for the next 30 or 40 years, for the young ones who saw the war and were shaken up by it in any way won't get the beastly thing out of their heads. The best hope is that the thing itself may gradually come to have less of its present aspect of beastliness and boredom combined.

To Arthur Rogers *July* 4, 1927

[*Right Off the Map*] is a sort of melodramatic yarn about a non-existent country at a slightly future time, so it takes all possible risks of not convincing the reader. Also it hasn't got a 'happy ending', and it's likely to be slated as a pacifist tract, though it isn't meant so. So beware how you invest in it, even with the kindly intention of keeping wolves from my door. Do come and see that door, especially its inside, when you are motoring in these delectable mountains. . . .

Of course I'll be most willing to write my name in your copies of my books, though the thought of a comment rather frightens me—makes me think of the 'album verses' of antiquity. But if you send me *The Morning's War* I shall write in it 'My Worst Book, so far' and ruin it as a property. So take care.

The play which formed the basis of *Right Off the Map* has not been preserved; it must have been one of Montague's earliest efforts. The pressmen, the bishop, and the 'captain of business' recall the heightened, merry, farcical style of *A Hind Let Loose*. In the rewriting are blended Montague's experiences of the mountains and of the front; and the fatal campaign of the Rians in the Boat Valley, high up in the snows, is a brilliant piece of imaginary yet not fantastic warfare. There is also the panoramic gift, of calling up great distances and prospects to the mind. The setting is a sort of satiric tragedy, with a purpose that is not too clear. A community is shown up, which is so rotten in peace that it is unready for war; it is beaten and then bullied by an efficient foe who knows no mercy. The waste and inanity of war in general also come to light. The hero, Willan, one of Montague's tough and unbreakable and not too bright Englishmen, is shot by the victors for a breach of the terms; he had led up his relief force and attacked them, in ignorance of the surrender. And it is the vote of the empty weak man, the facile pressman, whom Willan had admired, that turns the scale ; he has been forced by the enemy to sit on the military court. Doubtless, in the original play, this would have been the potent last scene; but it cannot be called melodrama, for melodrama must not end with a death. *Right Off the Map* is a fierce, rather turbid book, full of power; and its motto, I suppose, might be that which I saw printed upon rows of Socialist hats in Brussels just before the war—*Guerre à la guerre!*

XII

The final collection of Montague's stories was published a few months after his death; the first of them, *Action*, gives the title to the book. They show, I think, a definite advance in power. They contain, like *Fiery Particles*, plenty of solid and real persons, and the uniting thread is much the same. The characters believe in taking risks and in not living tamely; mad risks often, or even amusing gambles only, but still they are worth while. There are half a dozen more good Irishmen, who often talk for most of the time. Some of the ventures are of an exalted kind: one man, feeling the signs of paralysis, goes out to make an end by climbing an impossible Alp; but while doing so he suddenly has to save another man, and is jerked into a resolution to await the natural end instead of committing suicide. Another, a soldier ('Wodjabet', so named from his invariable 'What d'you bet?'), has a mania, which ends as it must, for being shot at on the front. Again, the 'Man Afraid' (this is a sort of fantasia) deplores the fact that he is stupidly afraid *except* when he is in danger. The humours of the Thames bank and of the London language are displayed in the 'Great Sculling Race', and in 'A Pretty Little Property', which describes the sporting chances of a ferrymen's syndicate. Montague was attracted by the same kind of figures as his favourite Goldsmith: wayside wanderers, cheerful derelicts, philosophers of the tavern. He would have got on with many of the Canterbury pilgrims, though not, perhaps, with the Wife of Bath. In *Action* there is also the spy story, 'Judith', which is full of memories of Amiens

with its darkened streets. The book shows no sign that the author had reached the end of his material.

To Francis Dodd

June 11, 1927

M. and I are alone for the term, and almost live in the garden, as it's light till bedtime, and everything ravishingly beautiful outside. It seems 'not only dishonour but infinite loss', like Trinculo's mislaying of the bottle, to sit in a poky study adding to the infinite plague of print. I wish you were here, but perhaps it's inhuman to wish you out of Spain. It must be a great place. I wonder if we'll ever be like the Spaniards, with a top-hole empire lost to us, and visitors from the more Forsytean nations of the day saying that we're lazy devils, but rather likeable. . . . Good for you, about Thos. Hardy. It's great that you were not too late to get the big man in him. He's miles the biggest of our time, I guess. The more I read of Bennett, Wells and Galsworthy, the more I think so. He can afford to be not bright or smart in the least, for pages and pages, and yet be bringing it off all the time, which none of them can.

To Francis Dodd

Dec. 19, 1927

I was very near writing to you at the time you took on the honorific three letters [*A.R.A.*], same as Mr. Burne-Jones. I'd have done the same if I'd been you. As I get on in years, ma freen', I don't find I've got all the grand contempt I had for pundits, mandarins, academies and siccan institutions that I had when I felt like breaking the world and the king wasn't fit to be my uncle. I'm glad enough now to have got my worst book [*Right Off the Map*] safe out of my hands, so that it shouldn't be hard to make an improvement.

Of Montague's deeper mind, during these last years, there are various glimpses. The second American edition of *Fiery Particles* contains a new preface, dated May 1923, which is really an epilogue to *Disenchantment*. All old themes, says Montague, that the story-teller may choose are now coloured by war memories:

> The vision arises all right; the ancient essentials are there; but now it brings its own new incidentals, not chosen by you; the little world-old drama insists upon playing itself in some clammy hole in the soil of Artois, where you and the best of good fellows once smoked and nagged in half-darkness, or somewhere among the Loos wilds where a friend's eye looked lightsome an hour before he was killed.

Montague then dreams of the novelist or playwright of the future, who may perhaps arise and tackle the Great War when all its present flood of literature has evaporated:

> Why, we need not even give up hope of seeing the whole war imaged steadily in some immortalising mind of the metal that knew and loved both Fluellen and Pistol.

In the same preface are the words:

> War is shallow and flashy beside her [peace]; worse-conditioned, more cynical in caprice, it goes far beyond peace in the line of letting fools rule and of exalting the horn of the skilled shirker.

He could, no doubt, have written another volume on the fashion in which peace, she also, had destroyed illusions. This mood, crossing his habitual one of courage and of belief in the 'fundamental decency' of man, recurred to the last. I think that he always found

the life of the individual a great and inexhaustible romance, in spite of being dismayed by the doings of men in the aggregate and by the course of public affairs. A few months before his death he wrote an article on the birth-centenary, Feb. 11, 1928, of George Meredith, that ardent and strenuous prophet, 'the great optimist of his age'. Here he laments that the war has 'parched enthusiasm and shaken confidence' in contemporary writers; and feels 'the want of a full round blast on the horn of a positive enthusiasm or wonder':

> To those who know Meredith's work best it seems incredible that our rather sick world should let such a medicine for the sick mind go out of use.

This is not to be dismissed as the cry of a rather sick man; Montague was never that. Rather, he was a good, impenitent Victorian, in spirit of an age earlier than that in which he grew up. He revolted strongly against the cloud that had come over English literature and thought during the last quarter of the century; against the flag-wagging imperialists; against all strange immoralists; and also against the delicate men of letters who worshipped the force that they did not possess. This reaction is evident in his frequent articles upon Henley and Stevenson. He admired their art, at its best, but never spared their 'virilism', which seemed to him, I think justly, a parody of the real thing—virility. At the same time, he would have none of any cheap and sanguine solution, and saw very clearly the greatness of Thomas Hardy. Montague, it may be thought, did not live to discern all the seeds of power and promise in the younger minds of to-day; but he kept much of

his own youth. The union of this temper with the ethical strain and sense of discipline that were also in his blood may give a clue to some apparent contradictions. His satire was the expression of a hope that was disappointed, never given up. But he is the last man to be packed into a formula.

There are a few last letters to quote, for the years 1926–7.

To Dr. Aubrey Montague

Nov. 1, 1926

The coal strike is petering out miserably—both sides playing the fool, as far as I can see—the miners infatuated with excess of the qualities by which they and their likes won the war, and the owners as idiotic as old Prussians in their notion that it's good business to rub it hard into people you've beaten. It seems likely, to me, that the whole affair will make nationalisation certain, as you say, and that it will make the next Government a Labour one, with a clear majority over the two other parties and a furious quarrel inside itself —probably failing badly and making everything ready for a big Conservative reaction afterwards. It's a cheerful prospect, with the Liberals helpless.

To Allan Monkhouse

Feb. 16, 1927

I've been reading *Alfred the Great* slowly and delightedly, with envy and a little bit of terror—old age seems, anyhow, such a queer cavernous place, full of dim shapes and unaccountable shadows, that we have got to go into for a final adventure. It seems a much heavier business to behave oneself in it than in any of the jobs of youth, which are really of the nature of grand larks. While I read you I'm pushed further in

a direction which has always drawn me more or less—I mean towards thinking not only that the conventional talk about art's not 'having anything to do with morality' is as much overpressed as most conventions are, but that conduct is at bottom the main natural theme of literary art, as it's the most intimate concern of nearly everybody when he's alone and gets confidential with himself. A lot of current writing bores me, whenever I sample it, because it's so like what a kind of bright second-rate talk was, about 1890—a weary old game of supporting one another in pretending to be some bold, casual person that one wasn't, though everyone knew, inside him, that he had to go home afterwards and get down to the housework of straight living, whether he knew how to find it exciting and jolly or not.

To Francis Dodd *March* 21, 1927

It's grand that all was Set Fair at the Show and that your boom goes on from strength to strength. I guess it's good to have tasted both neglect and success in one's life, but more of success. I believe there was an old Latin physician who said that the way to keep well and live long was 'to vary and interchange contraries, but with an inclination to the more benign extreme: use fasting and full eating, but rather full eating; watching and sleep, but rather sleep, and the like'. Same thing holds with hard times and good times.—'Up the more benign extreme', as the Irish would say. You'll never have the Best Seller vices, so it's all right.

A last letter reverts to Montague's old doubts concerning the public schools, and also shows his partiality to his *Rough Justice*. His correspondent, a dental surgeon in Manchester, had sent him a copy of some private letters about that work from a colonial bishop.

To H. W. Norman

BURFORD, *Feb.* 20, 1928

It was very kind of you to send me the Bishop's letters. I think—of course my knowledge is only small—that he is quite right about the keenness of good prep. schools[1] like Lynam's—perhaps the best one in England—in coaching their boys. I feel, too, that a good many men come out of Rugby and the like with their minds alive and active. What troubles me about them is that, on the whole, they tend to make a boy's mind only docile, not inquisitive or eager, or delightedly observant, as a mind in full health ought to be. Perhaps I should rather say that they receive the boys with these qualities in them and somehow deaden and numb them by something subtly anti-intellectual in the school routine and attitude.

But I agree quite fully with the Bishop that there's no natural or necesssary antagonism between athletics and intelligence. It's only when the idealising of athletics becomes fantastic and sentimental that it seems to me anti-educative.

I am very glad you liked my *Rough Justice*—as I do—better than other books of mine. I cared more about some of the things, and types of person, described in it than about any others on which I have written. Some of the characters were suggested to me by those of the people I have admired most among all I have met. And, though many critical people say now that a novelist ought to have no preferences or partialities among his own characters, I fancy one may write best about those for whom one can feel an enthusiasm, as I did about my Garths and my Cart.

[1] The 'Dragon' School, Oxford.

XIII

Early in 1928 Montague resumed work on a new long novel, of a political kind; the story was to cover some twenty years before the Great War. He had read for the material and begun to plan it out; and he made a rough draft of a few chapters. He seemed to be well, and happily at work. The calamity that came was not expected. Late in May he went to Manchester to attend, as a member of the Court of Governors, the celebrations at the University on its Founder's Day. While staying with his father-in-law at The Firs, in Fallowfield, close by his old home, he was seized, after taking a chill, with acute pneumonia, and died, after a short illness, on May 28. At his funeral in the Manchester Crematorium were many of those who had bidden him a different farewell less than three years before.

Unless he be a great editor, a famed war correspondent, or otherwise a public personage, the death of a journalist seldom leaves much of a ripple behind it. But Montague's memory was saluted by those of his calling, and by many others, over the English-reading world with unusual depth of feeling and warmth of recognition—as it were with military honours. His name as a man of letters, and not only as a master of presswork, was already known in South Africa, Canada, Australasia, and India, as well as in Britain. American newspapers, great and small, bore witness too, and it is clear that *Disenchantment*, of all Montague's books, had hit the American reader hardest. There were tributary notes in Germany, and

also in Holland and Sweden. All these writers spoke much in the same strain. They felt that an artist had arisen among them who had surmounted the risks of his trade and of theirs and who would not be forgotten, and that a clear and high spirit lay behind his art. This is the root of the matter, and the general instinct seems to have got down to it. Charles Montague may have been fortified by a favourite author, Shakespeare, in his conviction that with common luck, and with effort, and with the spirit of youth and courage, life, however it be swept by tragedies, may be found excellent, ever fresh, and ever entertaining; and also in the conviction of what he calls the 'inherent decency of things'.

APPENDIX

INEXPERT APPROACHES TO RELIGION

§ I. Introduction. Youthful a-religion verging on alienation. But religious people seemed to have got hold of something. What have I got hold of? What was my religion? The search for germs or raw material of religion.

§ II. Items of possible religious experience. (1) Revelation of certitude in conduct and in art.

§ III. Ditto. (2) Mystic experiences.

§ IV. The relation of these to Heaven, God, immortality.

§ V. First stage of growth—coldness to religion.

§ VI. Second stage—scepticism as to atheism.

§ VII. Mystic experience again.

God, make my brooding mind a rift
Through which a meaning gleams.

INEXPERT APPROACHES TO RELIGION

I

I WAS not brought up to call myself a member of any one church and to try to believe as much as I could of what it gave out to be the saving truth. As far as I could see, every church had got hold of something by which some men and women who wanted to live rightly were helped to do so. It also seemed as if some men and women who wanted to live easily were being helped by their churches to do so; hard duties had to be done, troubling truths had to be owned to be true, and all that the churches did in some of these cases was to damp courage and honesty. A church's children asked wise and brave questions, as other children do, and their mother, like some other mothers, shirked the duty of finding a brave and wise answer, and told the children to run away into the garden and look for a gooseberry. Also the spites of the churches against one another did not seem to have much to do with Christ or to rise out of any communion with any God of love or even of good-nature. I had no means of judging seriously whether this church or that did more good or harm. So, like many men, I enlisted in none of them, feeling that, where it was hardest not to live basely, there was more help to be got by other means that I knew than by public prayer or private confession. More, the unhelpfulness of the churches did the word religion itself a wrong in my eyes. I had seen it so often used as a party favour or a cockade, the watchword of

some set or club, that I shrank from its use as a means of describing any emotion or impulse that seemed to me purely good. Better call them simply goodness, love, or hope than soil them with any word that might seem to connect them with warring parsons and the mutual contempts of congregations.

From that stage my unsystematic thinking passed into another. I found that it simply would not do to forgo the use of the word religion as a description of certain private experiences of my own which I also believed to be common in others. They had a power over one's life. Probably all or most of the contending systems which had taken their name and wanted to keep it for their own use had really sprung, at first, from some man or men's share of those experiences. Everybody, as far as I could guess, had something that might be called a religion. What was mine? And what was religion itself? What was the greatest common measure of all religions? What were the means by which all that was essential and vital in religion could be guarded, quickened, and made the most of, in a man's life?

I had not the time, the training, or knowledge to seek historical answers to these questions. All I could do was to interrogate my own mind—to ask, as searchingly as I could, what had gone on in it at the moment when its sensations were most religious, or nearest to religion, as I understood religion. The cross-examination was not complete. It was carried on during the Great War, in hours or moments of rest from work in the field. Such as it is, it was done with no object but to get at the truth, for my own help and, if it might be, for

other people's. Here are my notes of all that it came to, for what they are worth.

II

At all ordinary times one weighs the reasons for and against doing this thing or that. Will it pay well enough, in the long run, to make up for what it costs now? Will its honourableness, now unknown to the world, come to be recognised in time to make you amends for present endurance of obloquy? All very well to scorn delights and live laborious days—may it not be that when the time comes to rest and find joy in the finished work, your very power of resting and finding joy will have failed? When one of two possible courses seems to you base, and the other noble, what if this seeming be only a lure to your vanity? What if an all-seeing eye would find in you only a coxcomb, a poser, seeking a fine, telling pose, an effective part to play before men? Are you quite sure that you really believe in the standards by which you are judging the one course and the other? That you are not feebly taking as final measures of beauty and nobleness the notions current in your time and class? So one worries it out, trying to see, trying to measure, trying to work it all up to the form of a sum in subtraction.

At other moments, much rarer, your mind is set suddenly free from this way of judging what is best worth doing and having. Suddenly you are aware that at that time only one thing is worth doing at all, that it is supremely worth doing, and that it has ceased to be hard to do. You cannot say why. All that you know is that your ordinary counting of possible loss and

advantage has ceased to matter; no loss will trouble you now; no gain is needed to add to the compelling call of the course to which you are drawn. A spark of the faith that can leave all and follow its object alone has flamed up inside you.

Such moments may come at the unexpected appearance of some opportunity for instant generous action; or they may come at the dawn or noon of a noble affection between man and woman; or the spark may be blown into flame by the rushing wind of some artist's inspiration in a book or a song, or by some flashing word of a friend's. There may be physical symptoms—a moment's taking away of the breath, or the sense of a cool breeze quickly crossing the face;[1] perhaps there are others. In some persons you can see one of these ecstasies of surrender to inspiration indicated by a singular ennoblement of expression; the face is transfigured with a spiritual radiance, as if some essence of the soul, usually confined, had disengaged itself, and was liberating unsuspected reserves of lustre and melody from its casing of flesh. Something like this seems to be expressed—or its expression attempted—in some sculptured heads by Mino da Fiesole and painted heads by [ ].

Sensations akin to the one I have tried to describe occur at some stages of sexual excitement and of intoxication. When Antony says 'The nobleness of life is to do this', and kisses Cleopatra and lets Rome and honour

[1] On some epithet in a poem, he once wrote that 'It made a little puff of cool air go ricochetting across my face, ducks-and-drakes-wise, which is my carnal symptom when other people, apparently, have their "breath taken away" or their "hearts coming into their throats" '.

and life go hang, one must not deny his point of likeness —of limited likeness—to the saint and the hero at their own climax of rapture. There is the same sudden passion of indifference to all relative values in different objects and satisfactions, the same invasion and absorption of the whole mind by a sense of the absolute and supreme value of one satisfaction and of the nullity of all others. A man partly drunk revels in a similar sense of transcendent beauty, interest, and worth in some idea or project which possesses him. I think more men get drunk in order to achieve this trance of spiritual liberation than for any other reason.

What, then, is the distinction between the real thing and the snare, between revelation and illusion, between authentic inspiration and the pseudo-inspiration of lust, alcohol, opium, or ether? The test question seems to me to be this—What do you feel afterwards? In the reaction after a surrender to lust or drink a man knows that he has been cheated, and that he is less of a man than he was. In the awakening from an ecstasy of the higher kind of vision he knows that he has been helped, that he is a better man, and has seen further into the very heart of life. Nobody ever fought better when morning came for having been drunk and full of seemingly beautiful thoughts the night before. And

> The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action.

But even when the other kind of vision has faded you never doubt its authenticity; the light is gone and again you are picking your way through a twilight with lantern and stick, and life is effort and puzzle again, but

still you are sure that you were for an instant ennobled and saw like a god.

To these moments of direct vision men and women have won their way by many different routes. They have evidently been attained during the intense and glowing meditations of some of the saints. You can hardly mistake in the life of St. Francis of Assisi the many moments of this ecstasy of liberated intention, of the enamouring beauty of right conduct. A kindred form of rapture is achieved, in greater or less measure, by every artist of high gifts, at those divine crises in his work when his mind's absorption in a delicate and exacting technical effort passes into a kind of precariously poised trance of unimpeded creativeness; during it beauty comes without travail to the birth, and the artist's own mind, or some part of it, seems to look on at the happy miracle from without, enchanted or awed by the strange, uncalculated rightness of each effortless touch that he gives to the thing that takes shape in his hands. Often, as in some of Shakespeare's lyrics, this divine rightness is particularly far from the rightness of this world; it gains its end—that of moving men's hearts and minds—through a kind of inspired unreason, irrelevance, incoherence, a pointed rejection of just those sequences of thought, those connections and transitions which might have seemed more logical and lucid. And, yet again, a kindred rapture may visit a man suddenly faced with peril and opportunity in a battle or an accident. He is released—that is all you can say. Fear and desire, his two keepers through life, to preserve and enchain him, are suddenly gone, and he goes to self-sacrifice as lightly as a child draws its breath,

with so perfect a freedom from all sense of effort, danger, or pain that presently he is surprised and abashed, and feels like a secret impostor when people credit him with heroism.

To gain the greatest possible number of such moments, to find them protracted in time and clarified as windows giving on the world outside you, and to be able to use them as springs of action or creation in the intervals between their visits—this is success in life, this is growth to the full stature of man, so that his feet can be on the earth and yet his head reach at many places into heaven.

III

When I was a child I sometimes had an experience which I tried to describe to other people. I had not the skill to do this well, or to make it seem of any interest to them. So I gave up trying. But I went on seeking draughts of the curious experience.[1]

It was this. I found that by looking very fixedly, with half-closed eyes, from my bed at a lighted candle on the chimney-piece and by thinking to myself, very hard, 'I? I? What is "I" ?' I could work myself up, for a few seconds, to a state of mind in which I got rid altogether of what I called 'I-ness'. During this momentary trance of detachment it seemed strange and interesting that there should be a creature there who had all this time been taking as a matter of course this odd division of everything into an 'I' and a lot of other people and things. Or, strange as it may seem,

[1] This and some of the experiences that follow are cited, dramatically, in *Disenchantment*, ch. v. Occasionally the words are the same.

this might be put the other way; it might be said that my sense of my own personality, lonely, unexplained, and strangely committed to the adventure of its existence, became more and more intense and essential, my consciousness of everything else falling away and leaving nothing but a vivid, thrilled awareness of the first person singular, no longer a matter of course but an enigma and a wonder. Why should there be any 'I' at all? I tried desperately to keep up the trance or vision; for it seemed as if I might see all sorts of things in new, fascinating ways; but it always collapsed almost as soon as it had come and I was left thinking 'What a pitch I got it to, that time!' and meaning to get it to a higher pitch still if I could. It had not been mere 'thinking' about personality; it had been a momentary release from it, obtained by a preparatory effort of thought, but itself a state of exaltation or vision or impassioned contemplation of a marvellous fact in all the freshness and fascination of its marvellousness.

I went on doing this, now and then, all through my youth, and later. Sometimes I tried to find out whether other people had like experiences, but I could not find any case. But one day, in Mr. Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*,[1] I found it, or something like it, described vividly. Apparently Kim was able to call up my little ecstasy when he wished, and it was said to be a habit practised by some kind of native mystics in India.

A very few white people, but many Asiatics, can throw themselves into a mazement as it were by repeating their own names over and over again to them-

[1] Chapter xi.

selves, letting the mind go free upon speculation as to what is called personal identity. (When one grows older, the power, usually, departs, but while it lasts it may descend upon a man at any moment.)

Afterwards I found in Tennyson's *Memoir* a note of what seemed to be a similar experience.[1]

A kind of waking trance—this for lack of a better word—I have frequently had, quite up from boyhood, when I have been all alone. This has come upon me through repeating my own name to myself silently, till, all at once, as if it were out of the consciousness of individuality, individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being, and this not a confused state, but the clearest, the surest of the surest, utterly beyond words. . . .

An experience quite distinct from this was frequent during my youth. Though it came seldom afterwards, its visits have never wholly ceased. There were moments, especially out of doors on nights of great beauty in quiet and beautiful places, when delight in the loveliness of the moon and starlit sky would pass into a sensation of being separated by only the thinnest possible film or membrane from the perception of something more vast and wonderful than anything that I had ever perceived, or could, at other times, think of perceiving. It might be a sight; as the stars twinkled into clearness at dusk, it might at any moment come shimmering into visibility. It might be a sound; it might even then be stealing up close to the frontier of audibleness, as the sound of the weir near my father's

[1] *Memoir of Alfred Tennyson*, 1897, i. 320 (quotation abridged).

house on the Thames must have been delicately approaching that line in the moments before I first heard it each time I came home. Or it might be something neither to be seen nor heard, but apprehended by the help of some sixth or other sense that had hitherto lodged in me unused and unsuspected—for why should our senses stop at five, and was it any more difficult to imagine the existence of a new sense, a subtlest sense of all, than it would be for a man born blind to imagine the operation of sight? Or it might be that no special organ of sense would be needed and that one's mind or soul would take in, without the intervention of sense, the wonder and glory of that which was to come. It never did. The miracle did not happen. But there was the most stirring sense of its imminence, the most intense assurance that it was waiting outside the opaque chamber in which, as I felt sure, my mind had dwelt in its common state; that the walls of this chamber were thinning away, their opacity was melting towards transparency; a little more, and all that was turbid and vague in the world might run out radiantly clear, and all the riddles be easy and life flow like a song.

Yet another personal experience; this time so common a one that records of its advent are frequently exchanged, with a pleasant sense of recognition, between all sorts of persons. I mean the sudden flash of certainty that something which is happening now has happened before; that something which is being said now was said in our hearing before;[1] that some place which, in the usual sense of the word, is new to us, is really known to us from of old, and is only being revisited, not dis-

[1] See *Disenchantment*, p. 76.

covered. In my own case there is no feeling, at such times, that possibly the mind may really be recurring to ordinary experiences somewhat similar to those of the moment—that a present incident is merely recalling a somewhat similar previous one. The identity is too complete for that. I rather feel as if the previous experience must have been gained in some state separable from this life, or by some conscious being whose consciousness is not exactly coterminous with mine, so that some sensations which fall wholly within his consciousness may only slightly overlap the borders, as it were, of mine, in such a way that I may be only conscious of partial, occasional gleams of a knowledge which in him may be full and constant. Of one thing I am always sure, at these times—that the fugitive impression is not delusion, but vision, not morbid or deceptive but rather a fleeting access of insight into something more than I can understand at ordinary times. A little rift has opened in one of the screens that are hung round me, and I have peeped through for a second into an outer world that seems strange only because I am accustomed to a confined and dim one; then the rift has closed again.

This experience is described by Rossetti in his well-known poem 'Sudden Light', which must have delighted many persons, as it did me, by giving them the impression of a spiritual adventure of their own.

I have been here before,
  But when or how I cannot tell:
I know the grass beyond the door,
  The sweet keen smell,
The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before,—
How long ago I may not know:
But just when at that swallow's soar
Your neck turned so,
Some veil did fall,—I knew it all of yore. . . .

Tennyson described the same experience in 'The Two Voices', though with less beauty and precision:

Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—

Of something felt, like something here;
Of something done, I know not where;
Such as no language may declare.

One more experience, and then I shall have brought into one heap all my small store of material to build with. All my life there have come, at intervals, short periods during which there seemed to be utterly torn apart or lifted away the veil of banality and dulness which familiarity had drawn over some everyday thing or some common truth. Sometimes the subject of this de-banalisation would be a concrete thing—bread, or the fire, or a bed. I would see, almost suddenly, that in my poorness of mind, I had been taking as dull matter of course what was radiantly wonderful and moving. While the spell held I could look at a fire and be thrilled with a touch of the triumph and joy of Prometheus. The family breaking of bread at a meal took on, for my mind, the beauty of a sacrament, for the fact was no longer hidden from me that every meal eaten, where love is, has that quality. I would chuckle with glee at the sight of a bed, the sum and expression of so

many centuries of grave childlike human contrivance. Much more seldom this clarification of mental sight would occur in a dream. It was always in a dream of some person dear to me—not dreams of anything that they did or that befell them; rather simple portrait-dreams, poignant visions of their faces with the expression of their characters and feelings worked out with a poignant clearness and vividness that reproached me for not having seen all that before. 'O, I have ta'en too little heed of this', was the remorseful feeling with which I awoke, and I was afraid that the person I dreamt of might have died, so extremely close was my sense of compunction for past insensibility to that which one commonly feels after the death of a friend. Or, when awake, I would see for a short time, with the same sudden distinctness, the beauty of the truth of some truism, as I had fallen into regarding it. Perhaps some precepts of Christ's, which I had mechanically pattered off, a thousand times, in church, would break upon my sight in a fresh and thrilling newness that might have stirred its first hearers. Or some such idea as that of divine love would be transfigured with this novel light, and I would be awed and enchanted with the notion, as a thing possibly practical, of an affection really embracing all men with a tenderness actually like my own father's for my brothers and me, and watching the hardness and cunning of debased grown men, the crimes of bad kings, and the tricks of politicians and 'pillars of society' with no more bitterness or despair than my mother felt at our puny naughtinesses.

Sometimes the field of illumination was wider. It seemed to extend to all the contents of life. I looked at

everything, and, behold! it was very good. Even pain became an adventure. I would give little shivers of exultation at feeling the different qualities of soft earth and pavements and floors under my feet, and when I rose in the morning the dawn might have been the first that had ever broken for me, it was so enchantingly rich in the glory and freshness of an unjaded marvel.

Mind, this was no outcome of any effort of thought. It was not worked up to by any attempt, so far as I know, to 'interpret' the world, or by any deliberate assumption of an attitude of devotion or receptivity. I was passive. It all swam into my ken through no conscious doing of mine. Unlike those first momentary intimations of things ordinarily beyond my perception, it came rather gradually, lasted for hours or a few days, and faded gradually again. Probably everybody has experienced it too, and systematic thinkers about such things have, no doubt, given it its place among the other ordinary phenomena of consciousness. I only record it here so as to give a true list of the private sensations which seem to me to have been the possible raw material of a plain man's personal religion.

IV

Now to look back over these separate experiences, and to pick out what may be most essential in them, and to see what they may mean or to what they may point.

One thing common to them all is this. Truly or falsely, they all bring with them and leave behind them some prompting to believe that in all other states of

consciousness one's mind and heart are not all that they have it in them to be. It is not merely that mind and heart are at ordinary times less strong, clear, and noble in the sense in which these qualities ebb and flow within them even in those ordinary times. The difference is not merely that between high tide and low; it is the difference between seeing a plain from this or that point on its own surface and seeing it from a mountain. The difference in the measure of mental and moral perception is so immense that it becomes a difference not merely in degree but in kind. The soul does not merely seem to be at its best; it seems to be, for an instant or more, a soul of a higher order, for which the limitations imposed on us by space and time, desire and fear, simply do not exist. The instants pass, but there remains in the mind the idea of a state, or of a being, in which, or to whom, this momentary exaltation might be permanent and normal, so that it would be no more natural [as unnatural] for such a being to fall short of perfect insight and absolute, universal love than it is [as it is natural] for us to make mistakes and to fail in kindness.

When once that idea has found a place in the mind, you have the living germ of the conception of God and of Heaven. It seems to me that if I could sustain my own mind and heart at the pitch of clarity and tenderness to which they rose and stood poised for some of those odd seconds as suddenly and precariously as a little ball thrown upwards on the tip of a vertical jet of water, then I should be in Heaven, though on the earth. It seems to me, too, that if for myself those instants of liberation from every disabling circumstance of the earth and the flesh are possible, there is no hope-

less difficulty in conceiving a being, a conscious essence or spirit, for which those circumstances never exist. In ordinary states of the mind, such a detached, unconditioned consciousness may well seem as inconceivable as the last of all numbers or the ultimate edge of all space. But when your own spirit has just penetrated, though only for the most minute point of time, to regions of reverie or meditation in which self itself evaporates, and consciousness floats free, impersonal and sovereignly intense and serene, then a greater marvel has already come about than would come if the sum of all such transfigured states of consciousness were shown to have a unity of its own, and gave to them and took from them, animated and informed them, stocking the minds of us all with some measure of its own abundance, and perhaps drawing increase of its own virtue from our success in making the most of our several loans from its riches. Very roughly, it would correspond to some such physical thing as the pervasion and sustenance of the whole earth by its fund of water, living now in a lettuce and now in a man, and giving existence by turns to a river, a glacier, and a cloud, never dying itself, but having a part in innumerable lives which seem to end. Is their fragility or its permanence the more real thing? When a portion of water has taken part in the earthly life of a poet, a snowstorm, a lion, and a cloud, and goes on unspent to new births as the mist of a midsummer dawn and the music of falling streams, it seems extravagant to see in all this only the separation, the limitedness, and the evanescence of each of those distinguishable things which seemed to come into being and then cease, and not to see as clearly the element of immortality and in-

exhaustibleness in that which lent itself to them all and resumed itself from their graves. So it may be with our own mixed and limited consciousness of the world. It is not fantastic to think, that of our spirit itself, as of the water that lets our blood run in our veins, there may be one common, eternal, and, in a sense, infinite and ubiquitous stock, presenting itself in many forms and modes, often difficult of access, but never far from us, living within us under more or less disguise, and living and waiting around us in greater abundance and purity; possibly, even, during our bodily decay and death, transferring its energies into other personalities, or other phases of our own, with so little of discontinuity that there may be much exaggeration in our common thoughts of the finality of death.

To me this suggestion of the possibility of God and of approaching Him has come most powerfully at those moments, already described, when some beautiful night seemed to have the quality of inarticulateness nearing articulate expression. There are two lines of Shakespeare that often helped to evoke a mood of special sensitiveness to this rising or emerging voice from without:

> When creeping murmur and the poring dark
> Fills the wide vessel of the universe.

In repeating them to myself I felt aware, with certainty, that when Shakespeare made them he was full of a sense of some unseen thing brimming up to the point of overflow. And yet that does not rightly express what I felt, and what I believed Shakespeare to have felt. For it was not exactly as if some reservoir of concentrated significance, set somewhere apart, were filling

itself and about to lap over into an empty space around it. Rather it seemed as if all space were the reservoir, as if the approach going on was not towards the fulness of a special vase, but towards the intensification of the quality or virtue of that which already filled the whole world. Some essence or principle that was everywhere, within me and about me, seemed to be moving up an ascending scale of lucidity. Or, to put it more precisely, the enhancement was twofold. Both the I who perceived and the unknown object of my perception were gaining in power, I in the power of apprehending, and it in the power of interpreting itself to me. So there was something approaching the semblance of a communion with a god, the quickened and delighted sense of the adorer feeling itself to be met half-way by the unknown divinity's responsive visit.

Like the love that never reached its mortal close, that approach to a communion was never fulfilment. And yet, when power flagged and the mists that were lifting had closed in again, there was never left any sense of mere barren frustration, but only a great joy at having had one of my best times and risen in mental stature. Also there remained the conviction that the rung I had reached this time on the ladder was still far from the top, and that there was no limit set to the rungs higher up. Like Jacob's it ran up and up, and it was the same in direction.

V

Like many other people I was set for a long time against the use of such words as God, heaven, revelation, holy, and religion. I heard them used so glibly and

perfunctorily, and often so basely, that they seem to have contracted a kind of vulgarity and insignificance which made them less worthy than others to be employed for the expression of profound experiences or sincere thoughts. On the whole it might be said that those who had God most on their lips were, on the average, lower in mind and character than other people.

It was striking, too, that most of the few people who directly and publicly denied the existence of God, as conceived in the most widely accepted creeds, spoke with an honesty and courage which I could not mistake. They were clearly on a moral level higher than that of a common worldly parson or of a parent or schoolmaster who called in the fear of God to his own help when he was too lazy or unskilful to keep discipline without it, as a bad civil authority sends for troops to liquidate the messes made by its own incapacity for government.

Again, I did not see how it could be fairly denied that the growth of the most prominent churches was, mainly or in great part, a growth towards the unspiritual or even towards the anti-spiritual. No amount of desire to find things as I would have them could make the political record of the English Church seem like an expression of the spirit of Christ. The Inquisition, the robbing of the older religious bodies in England at the Reformation, the dark and narrow egoism of a few Roman Catholic priests and nuns whom I knew, the use made by most of the modern English Bishops of the secular power over their fellow-men that they have had through their membership of the House of Lords—all these things combined to dismiss the supposition

that the churches were valid as means of special access for man to anything overwhelmingly divine or imperiously inspiring. Clearly their membership and their priesthood were not pre-eminently aids to growth in wisdom or love.

The effect on my mind was specially heightened by the contrast between the obvious teaching of Christ and its practical denial by the chief exponents of official Christianity. I suppose that if there are two practical points about which Christ was clearer than any others, it was about the moral value of poverty and the moral badness of war. Yet everywhere I saw both lay and clerical pillars of churches denying both these doctrines in their lives. They raced for wealth. They left no doubt that 'Blessed are the rich' was a beatitude that they set above Christ's assertion of the opposite. In war, or when there was popular talk of making some war that looked easy and cheap, I saw Bishops and Deans apparently only concerned lest they should be thought less eager to join in war-dances and put on war-paint than anyone else. And all this denying of Christ in practice, without any frank repudiation of him as a teacher and nominal master, seemed to lead to a degradation of mind that reached further. Parsons who had brought themselves to attempt to twist the parable of the invested talents into a defence of much money-seeking, or to extract recommendations of wars of conquest from Christ's occasional uses of military metaphor and simile, must have broken down their own honesty of intellect to an extent that placed them lower than any honest atheist.

This last point came home to me acutely early in

the Great War. I had become a soldier, and I hoped to kill for the good of our cause, and, when the time came, I did what I could to that end. But it was never possible to suppose that in doing this I was following Christ[1] or that I was not disobeying him.

A case had arisen in which the probable results of obeying Christ's commandments faithfully were more horrible than the probable results of acting against them. But I mentally took off my hat to the Quakers, and knew that they were the better Christians than I. I sorrowfully resolved that when the war was over I would try to make up for my flat departure from what I believed with all my soul to be on the whole the most noble body of teaching ever formed. But for the present there was no help or comfort in anything I ever heard from the lips of a military chaplain—nothing but a feeling that they were very good fellows with muddled minds, some of them too little versed in coherent thinking to know what a muddle their minds were in, some of them merely putting us soldiers off, for our supposed good, with little absurdities of argument and pooh-poohings of serious reflection, because they knew enough to see that the case would not bear going into by the lights that Christ really gave us to walk by.

So it came about that all the institutional side of religion, its organisation in churches, its superstructure of creeds and dogmas, was always on its defence before my mind. On its results and its official expressions religion had a strong *prima facie* case against it. So many of the fruits were repugnant to reason and conscience that I did not much care to examine the roots of the tree. So

[1] See, on this matter, the letters and entries, pp. 165-9, *ante*.

far as I sought any guidance for conduct, I sought it in the example of persons of beautiful character whom I knew, and in passages of literature which had a compelling beauty of rightness. Beauty seemed to be the surest guide; baseness and cowardice repelled me as being ugly, as corpulence or a Bardolphian nose is ugly. But such a code of conduct as I had was all unsystematic; it was not thought out by myself, and it was not a submission to any divine or human authority that I acknowledged as sovereign.

VI

From that phase of cold neutrality towards the current definitions and professions of religion I passed slowly, during a period of many years, into a phase of interested neutrality. Several points of personal contact inclined me towards this. One of these was contact with the late R. L. Nettleship, the philosopher, and, I think, the wisest man, and one of the best, that I have known. Whenever he described a personal experience, I knew that it was absolutely real and worth minding—a reality of the same unquestionable kind as that of hunger or of fear or of being in love. He once spoke of religion as denoting any effort by a man to bring himself into union with what that man felt to be divine. And when he was asked what was divine, or what was God, he said that there were times in his life when he felt aware of something within him or about him, in the consciousness of which he was for that time free from fear and desire, and would have felt it easy to do what were otherwise the hardest

things in the world, for no other motive than that they were supremely worth doing. The words may seem trite or flat to those who did not know the man or the way in which he always used words. To anyone who knew him they brought the knowledge that here at any rate was a clear, strong, and honest mind's sense of a religious reality, pure and profound, and not acquired by proxy, nor expressed by rote, nor inspired by any weak or contentious impulse of conformity or disputation.

The next thing that weighed with me was the accident of sitting in church next to an acquaintance, a man of commonplace powers of mind but of extreme practical goodness, of whom I knew that 'he went about doing good' with his time and money to the best of his lights during a long life which was then nearly over. He prayed in a low voice with an energy of humble passion which I had never witnessed before. It was the real burning plea of a conscious son to some ideal or embodiment of fatherhood which was evidently so intensely conceived by the petitioner that, to my sense, the relation, at any rate, of human son to divine fatherliness became for the first time really and movingly conceivable. The purest love is in part its own end and fulfilment, however shadowy or illusory its object may be. Divine fatherhood might not be proved, but an exalted human sonship was. In this relation of subject and object the object might not exist, but the subject and one side of the relation did, and their poignant reality gave a new interest to that which they assumed to exist—the object and the other side of the relation between the two.

I need not go over the other accidents which led to a change in my attitude towards religion. Enough that they did draw me gradually from a temper of neutral rather stand-offish scepticism to a temper which was sceptical still but more disposed towards friendly inquiry. After all, should one not be as sceptical about negations as about assertions, as willing to doubt the case against faith as the case in its favour, where neither amounted to proof? Indeed I was now more sceptical than before, for I was not only too sceptical to subscribe to any recognised creed; I was also too sceptical to disbelieve definitely in anything. And clearly the purest among the devout had got hold of something; they were more moulded by it than I was by anything that I knew or had felt; and where there was clearly a power to change heart and mind for the better, there must be something worth looking into. In this new temper my mind went to work afresh on its own experiences and tried to find in them some relation to the experiences of religious people. I wanted to know whether there were, among my own thoughts and feelings, any atoms or units of what might have been the raw material from which those people's religions were made.

VII

One such unit seemed to be possibly discoverable in that momentary trance of liberation from my sense of self, or as it sometimes seemed, of intensified consciousness of the riddle of personality. When such moments came to me now, I asked myself, Could it be thus that some of the saints had felt in their first

astonished approaches to that state of mind in which their self, in its lower sense, fell off from them like a loosened shawl and yet their self in another sense—their soul, their personality, appeared to them as a thing sovereignly important, inestimably precious, a treasure crying out to be saved from dangers suddenly felt to be instant? To me those moments of intense reverie brought no such fears. The enhanced consciousness of self and of its curiousness and precariousness was merely strange and interesting. But my reverie always left the impression of incompleteness. I had come to an open door, but it had closed before I could look through. And now I read in J. A. Symonds[1] how, from some such reverie, he had passed into another, more eventful and disturbing.

Suddenly [writes Symonds], at church, or in company, or when I was reading, and always, I think, when my muscles were at rest, I felt the approach of the mood. Irresistibly it took possession of my mind and will, lasted what seemed an eternity, and disappeared in a series of rapid sensations which resembled the awakening from anaesthetic influence. One reason why I disliked this kind of trance was that I could not describe it to myself. I cannot even now find words to render it intelligible. It consisted in a gradual but swiftly progressive obliteration of space, time, sensation, and the multitudinous factors of experience which seem to qualify what we are pleased to call our Self. In proportion as these conditions of ordinary consciousness were subtracted, the sense of an underlying or essential consciousness acquired intensity. At last nothing remained but a pure, absolute abstract Self. The universe

[1] H. F. Brown, *J. A. Symonds, a Biography*, 1895, i. 29-30.

became without form and void of content. But Self persisted, formidable in its vivid keenness, feeling the most poignant doubt about reality, ready, as it seemed, to find existence break as breaks a bubble round about it. . . .

So it seemed that what in me was only a rudimentary form of impassioned musing, the musing perhaps of a natural pagan, was in a more sensitive and gifted mind the possible basis of a definitely religious experience.

I gathered, too, that in some Eastern religions the habit of inviting and cultivating some such ecstasy of passionate passiveness of mind was practical and taught as a means of arriving at a devout or philosophic detachment from earthly concerns. The Buddhists, it appeared, worked from stage to stage of mystical contemplation, starting from intense concentration of the mind upon some single point, like my own childish fixing of attention on the spiky luminousness of the half-seen bedroom candle. By carrying the effort on and on, they successively thought away desire and then thought itself and then the very consciousness of being. Any such developments of mysticism were far beyond me; indeed I had the distaste of common full-blooded mankind for any such remote excursions into uncharted wildernesses of 'lawless and uncertain thought' as they seemed to be. And yet I could see that there was no necessary break in the ascent, or descent, from my own fugitive raptures of rudimentary and inarticulate mysticism to these heights or depths of religion, as religion is understood by those accomplished practitioners of its mysteries. In another country, with

another upbringing, I would have simply had to go on, as though from purer to purer mathematics, and grow from a 'Yogi' struggling with the obscurations of his lower self, into that advanced religious condition of 'Samâdhi' where the devotee is held to dwell at home with truths which instinct and reason can never know.

(*Unfinished.*)

ADDENDUM TO P. 276

This letter is in reply to a stranger who had written admiringly of *Rough Justice* and had also alluded to Mr. H. G. Wells and to the American Ambassador. After giving thanks Montague goes on:

To the Revd. Adam W. Fergusson

June 26, 1926

Yes, Wells's genius is wonderfully rich. He would have almost everything if he had a fuller sense of what the power and beauty of tradition can be. But there are no bounds to my admiration for the great qualities that he has.

I share your chairman's enthusiasm for Page's letters, and feel a glow of pride that our country should have won so much affection from such a man, though he could find faults in us too. What he said about the bearing of people in London under the first blows of the war must be one of the best testimonials ever written for a people.

'A. E.' (George Russell), 115
Abbott, Edwin Abbott, 9, 10, 11, 12
Abbott, Evelyn, 18, 20
Abercrombie, Prof. Lascelles, 68
Abyssinia, 49
'Across the Pennines', Montague's, 17
Action, Montague's, 7, 246, 282-283
Addison, Joseph, 21
Adventures in Journalism, Gibbs's, 173, 177
Aeneid, 183, 217, 223. *See* Virgil
Afghan wars, 210
Agate, James, ix, 83; *Letter to*, 83
Agincourt, 208, 243
Aiguille du Moine, 41
Aisne, river, 216
Aix-la-Chapelle, 229, 231
Albert, King of the Belgians, 225, 227, 229, 231
Albert (town), 30, 150, 163, 205, 218, 226
Alexander, Prof. Samuel, 269, 270-72 274-5; *Letters to*, 270-72
Alexander the Great, 237
Alfred the Great, Monkhouse's, 286
Allan, —, 20
Allenby, Gen. E. H. H. A., 239
'Along an English Road', Montague's, 255
Alpine Club, *Alpine Journal*, 41, 108
Alps. *See* Switzerland
Amateur Society, 46
America, Americans, 33, 132, 133, 145, 149, 195, 211-12, 213, 216, 238, 244, 249, 250, 284, 289
Amiel, H. F., 246
Amiens, 132, 136, 139, 141, 143, 144, 145, 149, 202, 203, 205, 206, 213, 216, 217, 282
Amritsar, 239
Ancient Mariner, Coleridge's, 71
Ancre, valley, river, 150, 205, 218
'Another Temple Gone', Montague's, 245
'Another Way', Montague's, 255
Antony and Cleopatra, 296
Arab (horses), 249
The Arabian Nights, 7, 96
Archer, William, 82
Aristotle, 82, 84
Armenians, 33
Armistice, 50, 106
'Armstrong, Robert', 59
Arnold, Matthew, 30, 77
Arnold, Prof. Thomas, 30
Arnold, W. T., 30-31, 32, 37, 39, 43, 44, 45, 50, 54, 62, 64, 106, 126, 150, 268; *Memoir of* (part by Montague), 31
Arolla, 57-8, 91
'The Aromatists', Montague's, 255-6
Arras, 148, 151, 156, 157, 159, 160, 165, 189
Art and Instinct, Alexander's, 271-272
Art and the Material, Alexander's, 269-70
Artists at the Western Front, Montague's, ix, 199-200

Artois, 284
Arve, river, 41
Asia, Asiatics, 25, 300, 318-19
Asquith, H. H., 253
Athens, 65
Atkins, J. B., 37-40
'Attamen', 85
Audricq, 213
Augier, G. V. E., 83
Australasia, 289
Australia, Australians, 133, 205, 207, 217
Austrians, 224
Authuille, 218
Autolycus, 77
L'Avare, Molière's, 83
The Awkward Age, H. James's, 73

Bacon, Francis ('Lord'), 10, 21, 23, 73, 248
Baedeker, 139
Bailleul, 189, 208
Baldwin, Rt. Hon. Stanley, 253
Bâle, 231
Balliol Coll., 9, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18 128, 277
Balzac, Honoré de, 259
Bapaume, 218
Bardolph, 314
Barrie, J. M., 133
Battle of Jutland, 129
Bavaria, 225
Beauchamp's Career, Meredith's, 63
Beauquesnes, 204
Belgium, Belgians, 102, 107, 226-229
Bellevue (Manchester), 120
Bellicourt, 219
Bennett, Arnold, 94, 111, 283
Benson, F. R., 44
Bergson, H. L., 259
Bernhardt, Sarah, 44
Béthune, 124, 128
Bible, 7, 74
Biggs, Walter, 29
Birmingham, 222, 230
Birmingham Repertory Theatre, 69
Bismarck, Prince Otto von, 33
Black Watch, 225
Blackfriars, 8
Blackpool, 58
Blackwood's Mag., 244
Blunt, W. S., 249
Boat Race, 55
'Boat Valley', 281
'Boche Castle', 191
Boer War, 35, 42, 43, 52, 53, 65, 67, 210
Bohain, 221
Boisleux-au-Mont, 158
Bonafoux, Lance-Corp., 157
Bone, James, *Letter to*, 129
Bone, Muirhead, 124, 133, 135-140, 151, 172, 193, 198, 200, 236, 271
Bonn, 231
Bootles' Baby, Winter's, 24
Bosanquet, Bernard, 271
Boswell, James, 56, 74
Boulogne, 146, 214
Bourlon Wood, 192
Brabançonne (song), 225
Bradford, Harry, 9
Bradford Playgoers' Society, 84-5
Brakenbury Society, 13
Brazilians, 133
Britain and the British Seas, Mackinder's, 254
Brit. Journal of Psychology, 270
Broad St., Oxford, 20
Brontë, Charlotte, 56, 83, 89
Broodseinde, 191
Brown, H. F., 317
Bruges, 221

Brussels, 226, 229, 231, 281
Brutus (in *Julius Cæsar*), 212
Buddhists, 318
Budgets, 33
Bully Grenay, 124
Burbo Bank, 67
Burford, 272, 273
Burne-Jones, Sir Edward, 283
Burns, Robert, 60, 76-7

Cadge, Capt. C. R., viii, 174-5, 176-7, 178, 206, 207
Calais, 150
Calvert, Louis, 46
Camberley, 108
Cambrai, 192, 221
Cambrai - St. Quentin, battle, 218
Cambridge, 11, 38
Campbell, Prof. Lewis, 43
Campbell - Bannerman, Henry, 89
Canada, 289
Canadians, 133, 217
'Can't Believe a Word', Montague's, 219
Canterbury Pilgrims, 282
Carlow, 34
Carlyle, Thomas, 190
Carr, Philip, 68, 69
' Cart ', 288
'The Case of Sir H. Gough', Montague's, 239
Cassel, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 207, 242
Catullus, 90
Celts, 90
Chamberlain, Joseph, 33, 53
Chamonix, 41, 230
Champex, 251
Chapman & Hall, Messrs., ix
Charing Cross, 40, 254
Charteris, Brig.-Gen. C., 173
Chaucer, Geoffrey, 282
Chaulnes, 205
'Chaytor-Tonge', 278-9
Cheapside, 8
Cheshire, 29
Chilterns, 259
Chilton, Rev. Arthur, 11
Chinese soldiers, 210-11
Christ, Christianity, 96, 102, 115, 140, 160, 165-7, 169, 212, 293, 305, 311-13
City of London School, 3, 8-13, 237
Classical Association (Manchester) 90
Claudio (*Measure for Measure*), 48
Clemenceau, Georges, 134
Cleveland, President S. Grover, 33
Clipston Camp, 112-13
Coleridge, S. T., 248, 259
Collon, Mt., 91
Cologne, 229-32, 243
Combles, 150
Concise Oxford Dict., 261
Congo, 111
The Conquering Hero, Monkhouse's, 260
Conservatives, Conservatism, 252, 253, 286
Contalmaison, 138
The Contemporary Theatre, Agate's, ix, 83, 84
Conway, Prof. R. S., viii
Coquelin, B. C. (*aîné*), 82, 88
Corneille, Pierre, 248
Corot, J. B. C., 41
Cory, William, 251
'Cosmopolis', 68, 69
Cotswolds, 273
Country Life, ix, 81
Courcelette, 145
Crawley, Rawdon, 270

'Creative Process,' etc., Alexander's, 270
Crewe, 43, 149
Croce, Benedetto, 44
Croisilles, 157, 158
Cross, C. M., 158

Dante, 248
Dardanelles, 113, 118
'Dawling', 19
Day, Sergt., 116
De Valera, Edward, 249
Deansgate, Manchester, 105
La Débâcle, Zola's, 241
Delville Wood, 147, 148-9
Derbyshire, 41
Diary, Montague's, 108-9, 129, 143-4, 145-6, 146-7, 148, 149-150, 151, 152, 155-8, 159-60, 167-8, 189-93, 201, 202-8, 209-10, 213-15, 216-27, 228-230, 232
Dickens, Charles, 73
'Didn't Take Care of Himself', Montague's, 25
Dillon, John, 89
Discourses, Reynolds's, 272
Disenchantment, Montague's, 98, 123, 134, 136, 173, 176, 190, 193, 200, 210, 219, 235, 238, 240, 241, 244, 253, 289, 299, 302
Dodd, Francis, 40, 56, 134, 271; *Letters to*, 56, 59, 60-61, 76, 80, 88-9, 90, 93, 98, 112, 114-15, 120, 202, 227, 233-4, 236, 251, 252, 264, 273, 276, 279, 283, 287
Don Quixote, Cervantes', 7, 96
Donegal Farm, 209
Doughty, H. W., viii
Doullens, 207
'Dragon' School, 288
Drake, Sir Francis, 127
Dramatic Values, Montague's, 45, 54, 78, 80, 82-5
Drogheda, 1
Dryden, John, 82
Dublin High School, 9
'Ducat', 279
Duff, Prof. Wight, 71
Dunkirk, 188
Durham, 23
Dutch language, 107
Dyer, Gen. R. E. H., 239
The Dynasts, Hardy's, 230

Ealing, 1, 2
Echoes from Oxford Mag., 22
Écu de France (hotel), 219
Education Act (1870), 70
'Eliot, George', 244
Elliston, R. W., 83
Elton, Oliver, 26, 27, 28, 41, 45, 55; *Letters to*, 67, 78, 128, 234
Engelbelmer O.P., 143
England, Englishmen, 2, 4, 5, 6, 65, 74, 75, 89, 127, 128, 129, 152, 201, 230, 244, 248-9, 255, 257-9, 277
English Church, 311-12
English Lessons, etc., Abbott's, 12
English Review, 81
Ennius, 71
Epsom, 7
Eschweiler, 229
Essays, Bacon's, 12, 23
Étaples, 123, 150, 152, 201
Euston, 80
Evangeline, Longfellow's, 89
Ewhurst Hill, 24-5
Exeter Coll., 14

Fallowfield, Manchester, 42, 131, 142, 232, 289
Falstaff, 49
Farmer, John, 16

'Farrell', 246
Faunthorpe, Lt.-Col. J. C., viii
'Fay', 'Mrs. Fay', 69
'Fear no more', Shakespeare's, 77
Feipel, L. N., *Letter to*, 261-2
Fergusson, Rev. A. W., *Letter to*, 320
Fiddes, Edward, 30; *Letter to*, 216
Fielding, Henry, 60, 74, 83
Fiery Particles, Montague's, 62, 98, 126, 200, 244, 247, 282, 284
Fiji, 244, 252
The Firs, Fallowfield, 233, 289
'The First Blood Sweep', Montague's, 123, 245
Flanders, 113, 128, 151, 188, 191, 207, 216
Fleet St., 32, 254
'Fleming', 60
Florence, 41
Fluellen, 284
Foch, Marshal Ferdinand, 222; 'A Foch Legend', Montague's, 240
Forbes, W. H., 17, 18
Forbes Robertson, Sir Johnston, 90
'Foreword' (to *The Western Front*), Haig's, 140
Forsyte, Soames, 279
The Forsyte Saga, Galsworthy's, 243-4, 283
'The Fotheringay', 250
'Fourteen Points', Wilson's, 221
Fowler, J. H., *Letters to*, 12, 70, 71-2
France, Anatole, 262
France, 114, 118-27, 131-225, 241
French (language, people), 2, 3, 74, 89, 127, 128, 130, 133, 139, 141, 142-3, 147-8, 158, 173, 191, 196, 208, 209, 216, 258
French, Gen. Sir J. D. P., 239
Fry, Roger, 272
The Fugitive, Galsworthy's, 85
Fyfe, Hamilton, 207

G.H.Q., 131, 132, 139, 157, 176, 186, 243
Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, 46, 78
Galsworthy, John, 67, 78, 85, 243-4, 279, 283
Garrick, David, 83
'Garth, Auberon', 20, 167, 277, 278
'Garth, Molly', 277
Garvin, J. L., 66
Gaskell, the Misses, 32
Gaskell, Mrs., 56
Gates (in *Henry V.*), 243
Gell, Lyttelton, 19
George V., King, 190
German Ambitions, etc., W. T. Arnold's, 106
Germans, Germany, 101, 102, 106, 107, 114, 115, 118, 120-127, 133, 143, 146, 156-63, 185-232 (*passim*), 243, 245, 289
Ghislenghien, 226, 227
Gibbon, Edward, 248
Gibbs, Sir Philip, 138, 163, 173, 174, 177, 189, 191, 207
Gill, Eric, 95
Giorgescu, Gen., 163-4, 190
Gissing, George, 95
Gladstone, W. E., 33, 46
Glasses, H. James's, 20
God, 89, 166, 167, 190, 193, 291, 293, 307, 309, 310, 311, 314-15

'God, do not give me any ease', Montague's, 119-20
Goethe, J. W. von, 82, 119, 248
Goldsmith, Oliver, 36, 73, 74, 89, 90, 270, 282
'Good Acting', Montague's, 82
'A Good Look at England', Montague's, 255
Goodrich, W. J., ix
Gough, Gen. H. de la P., 239, 240
Grand Guignol, 69
Granton, 129, 130
Granville-Barker, H., 78
'The Great Sculling Race', Montague's, 7, 282
Great War, 32, 35, 43, 52, 101-234, 235-6, 239-43, 276-80, 294
Greek Theatre, 43
Greenwich, 255
Gregory, Lady, 78
Grote, George, 10
Guildford, 24
Guildhall School of Music, 9
Gulliver's Travels, Swift's, 42, 241

Haig, Sir Douglas, 139, 140, 155, 198, 209, 222, 230, 235
The Halfway Mill, Montague's, 24-5
Hall, Frank, *Letter to*, 248
Ham and Eggs, Abercrombie's, 68
Hamlet, 90
Harbonnières, 217
Hardy, Thomas, 94, 114, 161-2, 249, 262, 283, 285
Hardy, Sir T. M., 75
Hare Hall Camp, 110-12
Harris, —, 148
Harrow School, 16
Hartog, Sir Philip, 31
'Hathersage, Mr.', 24, 92
Havre, 118
Havrincourt Wood, 192
Hawke, E. G., *Letters to*, 29-30, 55
Hazlitt, William, 82
Heath, Charles, 10
Heaton Park, Manchester, 232
Heaven, 291, 307, 310
Hedda Gabler, Ibsen's, 55, 148
Hegel, G. W. F., 271
Henley, W. E., 285
Henry V., Shakespeare's, 237
Herbert Spencer lecture, Alexander's, 271
Herford, Prof. C. H., 126-7
Herford, S. W., 62, 126-7
Hesdin, 151
High St., Chorlton-on-Medlocke, Manchester, 29, 37
A Hind Let Loose, Montague's, 40, 64, 66-70, 186, 281
Hindenburg line, 163, 192, 218
Hobhouse, Prof. L. T., ix
Hodge, H. S. Vere, *Letter to*, 278
Hohenzollern Bridge (Cologne), 231
Holland, 290
Holy Dying, Taylor's, 21-2
Home Rule, 5, 33, 34, 42, 53, 239. *See* Ireland
Homer, 133
'Honours Easy', Montague's, 245
The Hope, Montague's, 103
Horace, 90
Horniman, Miss A. E. F., 46
Horniman, E. J., 273
Hotel Cecil, 105
Hôtel du Rhin (Amiens), 146, 203, 206
Hotel Metropole, 110
Hôtel Moderne (Amiens), 206

Houghton, R., ix
House of Lords, 311
'How Thucydides', etc., Montague's, 21
Hugo, Victor, 229
Hume, David, 248
Hunt, William Holman, 59
'Hut 17', 111
Hutcheon, W., 7
Hyperion, Keats's, 61

Ibsen, Henrik, 46, 55, 83
Illustrated London News, 24
In Hospital, Montague's, 127-8
India, 33, 289
Inexpert Approaches to Religion, Montague's, 8, 165, 167, 290-319
Inquisition, 311
Ion, Plato's, 74
Ionica, Cory's, 251
Ireland, Irish people, 1, 2, 3, 5, 28, 33, 34, 35, 49, 65, 74, 75, 82, 89, 90, 92, 93, 129, 244-5, 249-50
Irish Brigade, 104
Irish Players, 82
Irving, Henry (the elder), 90
Irwell, river, 40
'Is this the end', etc., Montague's, 64
'Isabel', 76
Isis. *See* Thames
Italy, Italians, 41, 133, 213, 226
Ivanhoe, Scott's, 4

'J.' (Montague), 228
James, Henry, 19, 20, 73, 76, 94
Japanese, 133, 146
Jarvis, Charles, 96
Jefferies, Richard, 80
Job, Book of, 79, 86
John Bull's Other Island, Shaw's, 250
Johnson, Samuel, 40, 74, 90, 270
Johnstone, A. G. W., 54
The Jolly Beggars, Burns's, 77
Jonson, Ben, 27
Jowett, Benjamin, 13, 18, 19, 20
'Joys of the Street', Montague's, 40
'Judith', Montague's, 282
'June', 91-92
Juvenal, 106

Kandahar Barracks, 113
Keats, John, 61, 77
Kell, Sir Vernon, ix
Kemmel, 190
Kempster, Christopher, 273
Kennington, Eric, 199
Keswick, 237
Kim, Kipling's, 300-301
King's Liverpool Regt., 158
Kipling, Rudyard, 69, 71, 90, 300
Kitchener, Lord, 104
Kitt's Quarries. *See* Burford

'L.' (Montague), 228
La Bassée, 220
Labour Government, 252-3, 286
Lahoussoye, 205
Lakes, English, 41
L'Allegro, 61
Lamb, Charles, 68, 82, 83
Lancashire, Lancastrians, 33, 50, 211, 223, 277
Landor, W. S., 248
Lansdowne, Lord, 192
Laputa, 42
Last Changes, etc., Nevinson's, viii, 135, 238
Lauder, Sir Harry, 87, 88
Lausanne, 61
La Tosca, Sardou's, 45
Lavery, Sir John, 199
Lawson, Sir Wilfrid, 32

Lee, Lt.-Col. A. N., viii, 132, 133, 134, 135, 152
Lee, (Sir) Sidney, 32
Leipzig (battle), 34
Leith Fort, 129
Lemaître, Jules, 43
Lens, 124
Lessing, G. E., 82
Liberals, Liberalism, 13, 34, 52, 53, 89, 253, 258, 268-9, 286
Lille, 50, 190, 222, 223, 224, 226, 227, 229, 232
Lindsay, A. D., viii
Lit. Hist. of Rome, Wight Duff's, 71
Liverpool, 27
Lloyd George, Rt. Hon. David, 134, 253
London, 2, 4, 43, 58, 68, 70, 80, 107-110, 111, 174, 195, 214, 254-5, 277, 320
Longueval, 147, 148
Longfellow, H. W., 89
Loos, 284
Loraine, Robert, 162
Love in the Valley, Meredith's, 79
Ludendorff, Gen. Erich, 217
Lynam, C. C., 288
Lytton, Major Neville, 173, 206, 207, 212

'M.', *see* Montague, Mrs. C. E.
Macbeth, 57, 80, 86
Mackenzie, De Witt, 184-8, 204
Mackinder, H. J., 254
Madras, 25, 26
McCabe, Mr., 1
McCabe, Rosa. *See* Montague, Mrs. Francis
McDougall, Dr. and Mrs. Percy, 95; *Letters to*, 93, 95
'Man Afraid', Montague's, 282
The Man Who Failed, Montague's, 259-60
Manchester, 26, 27, 32, 37, 40, 48, 66, 68, 110, 222, 228, 230, 265, 266-9, 287, 289
Manchester Effort, etc., ix, 47-9
Manchester Grammar School, 72
Manchester Guardian, viii, 11, 13, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 35, 37-40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 50, 52-3, 54, 59, 66, 68, 81, 100, 104, 140, 183, 234, 236, 246, 263, 264-265, 267-9. *Articles by Montague, Specified*, 33, 34, 55, 63, 67, 101, 106, 172, 176, 239, 240, 254, 255, 270
Manchester Playgoers' Club, 81
Manchester Press Cricket Club, 266
The Manchester Stage, 45, 81
Manchester University, 127, 274-275, 289. *See* Owens College
Marcus Aurelius, 246
Marett, Dr. R. R., 14
'Margaret', 76
Marlborough, first Duke of, 59, 224
Marne, river, 216
Martinpuich, 143
Martyrs' Memorial, 16, 277
Masefield, John, 78, 133, 147
Masterman (exhibition), 12-13
'Matamore, Capt.', 164
Méaulte, 205
Meelin, Co. Cork, 246
Melbourne, Lord, 190
'Men scaling with taut finger-tips', Montague's, 109
Mer de Glace, 145
Meredith, George, 59-60, 62-3, 74, 78-9, 91, 94, 96, 183, 285
Merseyside, 68
Merton Coll., 17
Messines, battle of, 188-9
Methuen and Co., Messrs., 64, 66

Meyer, Kuno, 90
Midland Hall, Manchester, 46
Midland Hotel, Manchester, 61
Midlothian, 129
Mill, J. S., 36
Milner, Lord, 53
Mino da Fiesole, 296
Molière, J. B. P., 249
Mommsen, Theodor, 10
Monkhouse, A. N., 45, 46, 56, 66-7, 81, 113, 114, 115, 260; *Letters to*, 62, 66-7, 70, 73, 81, 97, 102, 107, 110-11, 113, 114, 115, 237, 263, 286-7
Monts, 225, 226
Mont Blanc, 17, 251
Mont St.-Eloi, 148
Montague, Dr. Aubrey, 1, 2, 3, 5, 11; *Letters to*, 252-3, 286
Montague, C. E.:
Descriptions, etc., of C. E. M., see Alexander, S., 274-5; Atkins, J. B., 37-40; Bone, M., 136-40; Cadge, C. R., 178; Carr, P., 69; Gibbs, Sir P., 177; Hartog, Sir P. J., 31; Heath, C., 10-11; Lee, A. N., 132-3, 134-135; Lytton, Neville, 212; Mackenzie, De W., 184-8; Marett, R. R., 14; Montague, A., 11; Montague, E., 99-100; Montague, F. C., 4-5; Nevinson, H. W., 135, 238; Phillips, Sir P., 179; Poynton, A. B., 13; Robinson, Sir H. P., 179-80; Russell, C., 23-4; Russell, Sir H., 151; Scott, C. P., 266; Shaw, G. B., 162-5; Sidebotham, H., 50-51; Simey, R. I., 23; Thomas, Sir W. B., 180-83; Thompson, J., 9-10; Tollinton, R. B., 13-14; Tomlinson, H. M., 152-4; Trayes, F. E. A., 8-9; Wells, H. G., 133; Young, F., 37
Montague, C. E. (*contd.*)—
Letters from C. E. M., see Agate, J.; Alexander, S.; Dodd, F.; Elton, O.; Feipel, L. N.; Fergusson, A. W.; Fiddes, E.; Fowler, J. H.; Hall, F.; Hawke, E. G.; Hodge, H. S. Vere; Hutcheon, W.; McDougall, P.; Monkhouse, A. N.; Montague, A.; Montague, Mrs. C. E.; Montague, E.; Montague, Mrs. F.; Montague, F. C.; Montague, F. F.; Nevinson, H. W.; Norman, H. W.; Pearson, V. W.; Rogers, A.; Scott, C. P.; Scott, E. H.; Tomlinson, H. M.; Turner, T.; Withers, P.
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Verse by: see *The Hope*, 103; *In Hospital*, 107; 'God, do not give me any ease', 119-20; 'Is this the end', etc., 64; *The Man who Failed*, 259-60; 'Men scaling', etc., 109-10; 'They died that life', etc. 168; 'Yes, of course it was sin', 165-6
Montague, Mrs. C. E. ('M.', born Madeline Scott), viii, 42, 66, 103, 114, 157, 233, 236, 243, 251, 283; *Letters to*, 42, 53, 57-8, 116-18, 121-3, 130, 141-3, 144-6, 147-8, 161-2, 166, 168-71, 175, 193-8, 208-9, 209-10, 211-12, 215
Montague, Evelyn, 99-100, 207
Montague, Francis (father of C. E. M.), 1-5, 89, 90
Montague, Mrs. Francis (mother of C. E. M., born Rosa McCabe); 1-5, 54; *Letters to*, 14-16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 26, 47, 125-6
Montague, Francis Charles, viii, 1-5, 16, 248; *Letters to*, 59, 125-7, 131, 149, 158, 231, 233, 237, 243-4, 250-51, 263
Montague, Frederick Florence, 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 56, 262, 276; *Letters to*, 7, 59, 64, 65-6, 69, 72, 73-4, 75, 76-7, 78-80, 86-8, 89, 90, 96, 97-8, 104, 248-50
Montaigne, Michel de, 248
Montanvert, 41
Morchies, 192
The Morning's War, Montague's, 5, 7, 88, 90-96, 280
Morris, —, 130
Morris, William, 273
Mr. H——, Lamb's, 68
Munden, J. S., 82
'My Friend the Swan', Montague's, 245
'My Sunday at Home', Kipling's, 99

Nameless Copse, 143
Napoleon I., 34
Nash, Paul, 199-200
Nelson, Lord, 75
Nelson St., Manchester, 39
Nesle, 205
Nettleship, R. L., 17, 314-15
Neues Stadttheater, 230
Nevinson, C. R. W., 199, 267
Nevinson, H. W., viii, 135, 218, 225, 238; *Letters to*, 238, 247, 264
New Army, 242
New Brighton, 67, 68
New Coll., Oxford, 243
The New Machiavelli, Wells's, 76
New York, 260
New Zealand troops, 217, 218
Newman, Cardinal J. H., 57
Norman, H. W., *Letter to*, 288
Normans, 249
Northcliffe, Lord, 134
Norwegians, 133
Noyon, 203
Nuneham, 11

Oak Drive. *See* Fallowfield
Observer, 66
Oedipus Tyrannus, Sophocles', 43-44
Olympia, Edinburgh, 129

One of Our Conquerors, Meredith's, 79
Orchies, 225
O'Shea, Mrs., 97
Ostend, 221
'Our Moderate Satanists', Montague's, 241
Outline of History, Wells's, 237
Owens Coll., Manchester, 26, 43, 95. *See* Manchester University
Oxford, 10, 11, 12, 13-25, 30, 55, 57, 84, 100, 128, 129, 149, 182, 223, 237, 271, 273, 277, 279, 288
Oxford Magazine, ix, 16, 21-2

Pacifists, Pacifism, 192, 196, 197
'Paddy' (C. E. M.), 8, 9, 10, 11
Page, W. H., 320
Parliament Act, 53, 239
Parnell, C. S., 34-5, 65, 97
Parson's Pleasure, 57
Pascal, Blaise, 246, 248
Passchendaele, 180, 184-5, 191
Pater, Walter H., 55, 251, 256, 264
Peacock, T. L., 248
Peak of Derbyshire, 31
Pearson, Rev. V. W., *Letter to*, 256-7
Pendennis, Thackeray's, 73
Pennines, 17, 258
Pepys, Samuel, 114
'Petworth', Turner's, 272
Philippines, 33
Phillips, Sir Percival, 174, 179, 189, 207
Pilkhem ridge, 181
Pistol, Ancient, 116, 284
Plato, 74
Platt Chapel, Manchester, 42
Playgoers' Theatre, 61
Plays and Playgoers, 85
Plutarch's *Lives*, 4
Plymouth Sound, 127
Poperinghe, 242
Portland, 259
'A Potent Medicine', Montague's, 47-9
Powell, F. York, 54-5, 59
Powell, J. U., ix
'Power, Father', 91
Poynton, A. B., 13
Pozières, 146, 163, 218
Pratt, Tinsley, ix
Press bureau (London), 174
Press bureau (Rollencourt), 152-4
'A Pretty Little Property', Montague's, 282
'Prigs', 26
Prince of Wales, 190
'Pro-Boers', 42
Prometheus, 304
Protection, 239
Prussia, Prussianism, 101, 166, 223, 226, 286
Public Schools, 6, 8, 70, 97, 243
Puritans, Puritanism, 59

Quakers, 167, 313

Rachel (actress), 83
Racine, Jean, 248
Radicals, Radicalism, 4, 140
Raemakers, Louis, 133
Raper, R. W., 25
Reform Club, Manchester, 266
Reformation, 312
Regular Army, 238, 242
The Return of the Native, Hardy's, 161-2
Reynolds, Sir Joshua, 56, 272
Rhine, 231
Rhoda Fleming, Meredith's, 59
Rhodes, Cecil, 33, 53
Rhodes, R. Crompton, 69, 230
Rhone, 41

'Rians', 281
Richard II., 44
Richmond Hill, Park, 2, 7, 11
Richthofen, 53
Right off the Map, Montague's, 54, 155, 165, 279-81, 283
The Right Place, Montague's, 150, 215, 251, 253-6, 259, 261, 265, 274
Ritchie, (Sir) Richmond T. W., 32
Riviera, 71
Robinson, Sir H. Perry, 174, 179-180, 191, 204
Robinson Crusoe, 7, 96
Rodin, Auguste, 55
Rogers, Arthur, *Letters to*, 95-6, 246-7, 260, 280
Rollencourt, Château de, 151-4, 188, 200, 204, 207, 214, 222
Roman Church, 1-3, 5, 92, 93, 311
Rome, 41
Romford, 110-12
Rossetti, D. G., 303
Rostand, Edmond, 61
Rouen, 124, 127, 231
Rough Justice, Montague's, 7, 20, 99, 108, 150, 167, 200, 236, 262, 270, 275, 287, 288
Roulers, 185
Roumania, Roumanians, 133, 163, 189, 190
Royal Fusiliers (24th, or Sportsman's Battalion), 105, 107
Royal Humane Society, 14, 132, 182
Roye, 203
Rugby School, 288
'Ruined Trenches', M. Bone's, 200
Rusholme Theatre, 46
Ruskin, John, 21
Russell, Lord Arthur, 23, 24
Russell, Conrad, 23, 24; *Letter to*, 240-1
Russell, Sir Herbert, 151, 174, 177
Russia, Russian, 28, 213, 239
Russian front, 131

St. Francis of Assisi, 96, 298
St. Giles's, Oxford, 16, 20
St. John's Coll., Oxford, 15
St. Margaret's, Twickenham, 11
St. Omer, 188
St. Paul's Cathedral, 273
St. Pol, 151, 168
St. Quentin, 207, 216, 218
Sainte-Beuve, C. A., 259
Salisbury Plain, 113, 114
Salome, 220
Salvation Army, 16, 277
'Samâdhi', 319
Sandeau, L. S. J., 83
Sandra Belloni, Meredith's, 63
Sarcey, Francisque, 43
Sardou, Victorien, 45
Scarpe, river, 151
Scheldt Canal tunnel, 219
Scherpenberg, Mt., 189
School of English (Oxford), 12
Scots, Scotland, 5, 65, 89, 129-130, 216, 249, 250
Scott, G. R., 17
Scott, C. P., v, viii, 21, 26, 31, 37, 42, 53, 68, 89, 103, 130, 236, 265, 266-7, 275, 289; *Letters to*, 26, 104-5
Scott, E. T. viii, 207
Scott, H. E., *Letter to*, 247
Scott, Laurence P., 62, 126
Scott, Sir Walter, 60
Scott, Walter (Dixon), 118
Scribe, A. E., 83
Seine, 231
'Sergeant Ramrod' (C. E. M.), 177

Shakespeare or Shakspere, William, 3, 7, 12, 17, 38, 69, 71, 76-7, 79-80, 87, 212, 243, 245, 248, 290, 298, 309
Shallow, Justice, 258
Sharp, Becky, 270
Shaw, G. Bernard, viii, 68, 75, 90, 116, 133, 155, 162-5, 250
Sheffield, 256, 265-6
Shelley monument (Univ. Coll., Oxford), 223
Shere, 24
Sidebotham, Herbert, 50-51
Silence, Justice (2 *Henry IV.*), 258
Simey, R. I., 23
Sims, Mr., 189
Slater, Prof. D. A., 90
Small, Mr., 189
Smith, A. L., 128
Smollett, T. G., 90
Socialism, 65, 281
'Something Like a Wreck', Montague's, 67
Somme, valley, river, 137, 139, 150, 163, 164, 188, 198, 207, 216, 217
South Africa, 289; South African War. *See* Boer War
South Devon Hospital, 127-8
Southampton Water, 127
Southey, Robert, 248
Southwark, 254
Spain, Spaniards, 133, 283
Spectator, 37, 45, 106
Spencer, Robert, 268
Spencer, Wilfrid, 29
'Sportsman's Battalion'. *See* Royal Fusiliers
Steele, Sir Richard, 90
Stephen, Sir Leslie, 41
Stevenson, R. L., 91, 285
Steyne, Lord, 270
Stone, Dr. W. G., 18
Strachan-Davidson, J. L., 18
Strand, 61, 80, 254, 258, 274
'Strange but True', Montague's, 199-200
Strife, Galsworthy's, 78
Strutt, Col. E. L., ix
Studies of Roman Imperialism, W. T. Arnold's, 30
Sudden Light, D. G. Rossetti's, 303-4
'*Sun of Venice*', etc., Turner's, 272
Sweden, 290; Swedish language, 107
Swift, Jonathan, 36, 43, 73, 89, 241-2
Switzerland, 41, 63, 71, 88, 91, 92, 93, 109, 117, 124, 150, 251, 275
Symonds, J. A., 317-18
Synge, J. M., 68, 83, 85, 88, 244

'T. E.', 97
A Tale of a Tub, Swift's, 241-2
A Tale of Two Cities, Dickens's, 76
Talisman, Scott's, 4
Tam o' Shanter, Burns's, 76, 77
Taylor, Jeremy, 21-2
The Temple, 254
Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 59, 75, 86, 301, 304; *Memoir of*, 301
Ternoise, river, 151, 152
Tesman, 148
Thackeray, W. M., 21, 73, 74, 89, 244, 250, 270
Thames, 7, 100, 231, 257, 258, 264, 265, 277
'They died that life might greater be', Montague's, 168
Thiennes, 119
Thiépval, 146, 217, 218
Thomas, Sir W. Beach, 174, 180-183, 225
Thompson, John, 9-10
Thucydides, 10, 21, 65

Tidworth Camp, 113, 114, 115
'Tiger' (C. E. M.), 138
Timbuctoo, 111
Times, 22, 115, 232
Times of India, 31
'Tipperary', 227, 231
Tollinton, Canon R. B., 13-14
Tolstoy, Count L., 164
Tom Jones, Fielding's, 60, 77
Tomlinson, H. M., 152-4, 162, 257; *Letter to*, 257-9
'Toomey', 245, 246
Tournai, 225
Transvaal, 43
Trayes, F. E. A., 8-9
Treitschke, Heinrich von, 106
'Trench Scenery', Montague's, 124, 198
Trinculo, 283
Trollope, Anthony, 244
Turks, 33
Turl St., Oxford, 20
Turner, J. M. W., 272
Turner, T., 85; *Letters to*, 85
Two Voices, Tennyson's, 304
Twickenham, 2, 6, 100
Tyrone, County, 1

Ulloa (ship), 67
Ulster, 33, 53,
Unitarian (chapel), 42
Univ. Coll. School, 3
Univ. Dramatic Club (Manchester), 46
Upper Brook St., Manchester, 30
'Us' (club), 27

Valenciennes, 223-4, 225, 226
Vaudeville Theatre, 55
'Venezuelan message', Cleveland's, 33
Versailles, 120
Versailles, Treaty of, 239
The Vicar of Wakefield, 7, 96
Victoria Embankment, 8
'Vigilans sed Aequus' (W. T. Arnold), 106
Vimy Ridge, 30, 188
Vindictive (war-ship), 221
Virgil, 17, 71, 126, 183, 217, 221, 223
Vissoie, 58

Wailes, L., 267
Walkley, A. B., 82
War and the Future, Wells's, 133
'War as it is', Montague's, 194
War Office, 104, 105, 106, 129, 156, 198
Ward (Sir) Adolphus W., 45
Ward, Mrs. Humphry, 30
'Warrington, George,' 81
Waterloo, 40, 75, 228, 229
Waterloo Bridge, 254, 258
Weald, 24
'The Well-made Play', Montague's, 83
Wellington, Duke of, 40, 75, 224
Wells, H. G., 76, 133, 138, 237, 283, 320
West African F.F., 111
The Western Front, Montague's, ix, 98, 101, 133, 140, 150, 151, 171-2, 193, 194, 196, 198-200
Westminster Abbey, 75
'The Wholesome Play', Montague's, 81, 85
Wieltze, 180, 191
Wife of Bath, 282
Wilkinson, Prof. Spenser, 30, 133
'Willan', 281
William II., Kaiser, 225, 245
Williams (in *Henry V.*), 243
Wilson, President Woodrow, 221, 222

Wimbledon Common, 7
Wiltshire, 108
The Windmill, 146
Windrush, river, 273
Winter, John Strange, 24
Wirral, 67
Withers, Dr. Percy, 95; *Letters to*, 94-5, 104, 236, 275-6, 280
'Wodjabet', Montague's, 282
Wren, Sir Christopher, 273
Wright, —, 130
Wylie, J. F., ix
Yeats, W. B., 65, 82, 90
'Yeobright, Clym', 162
'Yes, of course it was sin', Montague's, 165-6
Yogi, 319
Young, Filson, 37
Ypres, 164, 188, 190
Zermatt, 250
Zola, Émile, 241
Zulu War, 210
Zonnebeke, 191

THE END

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